

Dictatorship's Temporal Edifice

Ang Bagong Lipunan's
Manila International Airport

Juan Miguel Leandro L. Quizon

Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Gerard Lico's book *Edifice Complex: Power, Myth, and Marcos State Architecture* (2003) explores historical narratives via criticism of architectural structures built within the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Complex—the prime location where Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos's shared edifice complex was structurally manifested. Lico situates his architectural criticism in the context of Marcosian dictatorship that redirected foreign aid funding while appropriating the architectural works of Leandro Locsin, Francisco Mañosa, and Froilan Hong. These edifices, most of which are still functional until today, are residues of the Conjugal Dictatorship's vision of a new world order—*Ang Bagong Lipunan* [The New Society].

In this paper, I analyze the Manila International Airport (MIA), currently known as the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), and how the Marcos Regime utilized the airport to propel *Ang Bagong Lipunan's* directives and how it affected the families of the biggest users of the airport—the Filipino overseas contract workers (OCWs). I argue that the MIA produces a space that both consistent and inconsistent with the salient features of the *bahay kubo* [nipa hut]. This connects the family rhetoric of the Marcoses's *Ang Bagong Lipunan* and the experiences of the OCWs inside the airport through an architectonics of contradiction and excess. By extending Preziosi's concept of

“houseness” and how it relates to the simplicity and complexity of the hut and by supplementing the concept with Lefebvre’s spatial triad, I posit that this (re) production of airport space augments a nationalism that *Ang Bagong Lipunan* purports: associating self-sacrifice for the common good of the nation and the state that, ultimately, legitimizes a national narrative and cultural memory, both fantasized and constructed.

Keywords

airport studies, architectonics, Conjugal Dictatorship, Ferdinand Marcos, Manila International Airport, martial law

And yet, for all the absences that mark NAIA, it is an airport equally defined by excess. In place of the gaps and lacks so visible in NAIA, there are the lines that stretch endlessly, the “balikbayan” boxes piled on top of one another on cumbrous trolleys, the din of too much chatter, the poor families waiting by the fences, the excess delays, the filth of the toilets, the smell of dust accumulated over decades.

—Bobby Benedicto, Filipino scholar and academic

The value of an airport in relation to a country’s economic and financial status cannot be stressed enough. Despite this, governments “routinely misjudge environmental impacts, overstate economic benefits, and generally underestimate project financial costs in order to get them built” (Salter 96). These colossal projects also mirror the nation’s international relations not just within its immediate region, but throughout global aviation conglomerates and alliances. For many decades, airports, including national flag carriers, have “operated as instruments of nation-building, becoming symbolic projectors of both nationalistic propaganda and, on occasion, imperial power” (Raguraman 241). Such colossal projects mirror the nation’s international relations not just within its immediate region, but throughout global aviation conglomerates and alliances. Since the 1930s, airports functioned as “flagships of capital cities” and became “linchpins of modernization strategies” for these metropolitan hubs for air travel (Roseau 41).

The First Couple, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos,¹ were well aware of these economic, political, and cultural realities. The establishment of *Ang Bagong Lipunan*² articulated these visions of the Marcoses. With the declaration of Martial Law in 1972, Marcos unpacked various machineries for authoritarian control, including the exploitation of the family rhetoric “in an attempt to remake the Philippines into his image of a New Society” (McCoy 16). In a book published by the Philippine Army’s Office for Civil Relations titled *Towards the Restructuring of Filipino Values*, it stated that “[a] society is composed of people. New structures, new systems, new laws are necessary to build a new society. But these are not enough. To build a new society we have to build a new people. It is not the environment that must change. The people themselves must change” (i). In a sense, the Marcoses were aware of

how the air transport and aviation industry “provide one of the most highly visible articulations of power” (Adey et al. 780).

Ferdinand Marcos’s regime consolidated both legislative and executive powers in the president: “Marcos baptized the Conjugal Dictatorship as the ‘New Society,’ and alternately, as a regime of constitutional authoritarianism operating under the aegis of Martial Law” (Mijares 83-84). He wanted a peaceful and silent revolution that emphasized how the state has the real power to enact change and be effective in the efforts to transform society for the better. But within this spectacle, the privileged and chosen few families (including the First Family) benefited more than the others. At the height of the Marcoses’s forceful inculcation of their ideologies, they created cultural institutions, organizations, and programs in order to lay down the solid foundations of *Ang Bagong Lipunan*. But their imbalanced perspective and narrative by way of their *Ang Bagong Lipunan* has led to several flaws in the design narratives of the regime’s edifices, including the Manila International Airport (MIA).

In this paper, I analyze the MIA, currently known as the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), and how the Marcos Regime utilized the airport to propel *Ang Bagong Lipunan*’s directives and how it affected the families of the biggest users of the airport—the Filipino overseas contract workers (OCWs). I argue that the MIA produces a space that is both consistent and inconsistent with the salient features and other cognates of the *bahay kubo*³ [nipa hut]. This connects the family rhetoric of the Marcoses’s *Ang Bagong Lipunan* and the experiences of the OCWs inside the airport through an architectonics of contradiction and excess.⁴ This paper attempts to expand Preziosi’s concept in terms of applying the simplistic and complex design of the *bahay kubo* for the airport: “communication—both linguistic and architectonic—incorporates an emotive function as a particular kind of modificational orientation on one of the component parts of transmission” (*Architecture* 94). I posit that this (re)production of airport space augments a nationalism that *Ang Bagong Lipunan* purports: associating self-sacrifice for the common good of the nation and the state that, ultimately, legitimizes a national narrative and cultural memory, both fantasized and constructed.

The paper is divided into five main parts. The first part of the paper tackles a quick history of the Manila International Airport. The airport was commissioned through the auspices of the Marcoses and was designed by one of the favored architects of the regime, Leandro Locsin.⁵ After the historical tracing of the airport's construction, some theoretical frameworks on spatial and architectural discourses are unpacked in order to situate the underpinnings of the study. The second part of the paper focuses on the external features of the MIA and how its aesthetic design propels the cultural politics of the regime. The third part of the paper highlights the interior intricacies of the airport complex. Both the second and third sections of the paper are anchored on the discussion of how the MIA was inspired and designed from the traditional Filipino dwelling place, the *bahay kubo*. It is important to note that Imelda Marcos was the one to give such specific directives to Locsin. The fourth part of the paper emphasizes how the airport space of the MIA can be read as an extension of the cognates of the *bahay kubo*. The fifth part of the paper looks into how the Marcoses deprecated the various narratives of family rhetoric from political systems, architecture, and culture. Throughout the essay, I intend to include the lived experiences and cultural discourse of Filipino OCWs. In the end, the paper attempts to trace how this temporal (and temporary) edifice of the regime contributed to the establishment and institutionalization of the Marcosian ideology of *Ang Bagong Lipunan*.

Historicizing Locsin's Manila International Airport

First, a backgrounder. The MIA, presently called the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA), is right in the middle of the cities of Pasay and Parañaque, both of which lie in the southern end of Metro Manila. The location of airports is almost always at the urban periphery. Roseau posits that this idealization of airport placements “prefigures the city's extension and marks it out both as part of the city and its outer frontier” (41). The MIA shares a history of air travel and service to the central urban region and its neighboring provinces, and has serviced countless connecting flights to numerous island destinations within the archipelago.

In 1935, Grace Park Airfield⁶ began its operation in Caloocan. More popularly known as Manila North Airfield, this was the original airport that serviced Manila and was considered the foremost commercial airport that operated within the city and later utilized by the Philippine Aerial Taxi Company (Philippine Air Lines) for its early domestic routes.

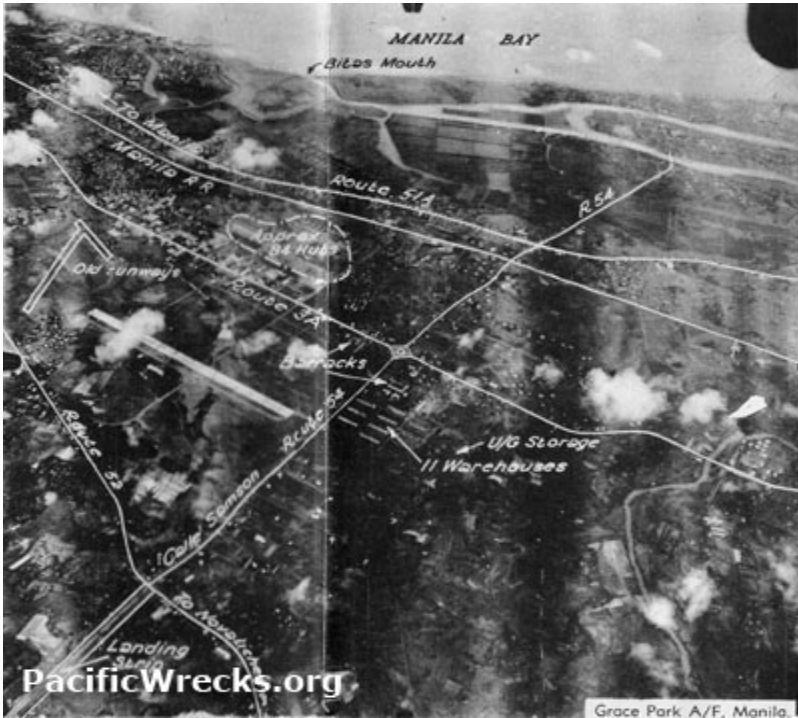


Fig. 1. Aerial view of Grace Park Airfield in Caloocan (northern Manila), bordering Manila Bay. (From Allied Geographical Section, credits to Pacific Wrecks, Inc.)

Two years after, in July 1937, the Manila International Air Terminal, situated inside the vast 42-hectare property of Nielson Airfield⁷ was inaugurated, serving as “the gateway to Manila” (Maurer 36). Currently, these runways form what we now know as Ayala Avenue and Paseo de Roxas, two of the main arteries that connect Makati’s fast-paced business district. In 1948, the airport was transferred to its current location adjacent to the

Villamor Airbase in Pasay City. In September 1961, the modern terminal of the new Manila International Airport began its operation in Pasay City and opened its halls to the public.



Fig. 2. Aerial view of the Nielson Airfield, with its two intersecting runways: the main runway NW/SE and a smaller runway running NE to SW. US National Archives.

Architect Federico Ilustre’s design for the new terminal was considered trendy during the 1960s, fashionable even by global standards. In Alcazaren’s (2001) account of the terminal’s architectural illustriousness, the airport’s canopies located at its entrance “were expressive statements in cantilevered concrete [and] the façade was a composition of sunshade screens, [while] the parking lot in front had a grand pool, space-age flagpole and neat Luneta-type landscaping” (PhilStar.com). Ilustre’s design of the MIA proved to be relatively more extensive and spacious as compared to its congested and narrow predecessor. Alcazaren provides the specific details of Ilustre’s design that made the new terminal an iconic structure during



Fig. 3. The Manila International Air Terminal, located at Nielson Airfield in Makati. NASM Archives.

those years: “Ilustre provided a double-height lobby, decorated with a large mural depicting Filipino life, while a large globe of blown steel housing an electronic clock that gave the time in various capitals of the world became a popular attraction as was the Hall of Flags, one for each of the countries that flew to Manila.”⁸

According to Alcazaren, the halls of the main terminal building also housed the country’s first escalator that led passengers to the facilities, offices, and other establishments located on the second floor (The Philippine Star). Friends and family of passengers had the option to proceed to an open outdoor deck, much like a veranda, to wave and gesture at passengers while watching jetliners depart and arrive along the wide runways.⁹ In a sense,



Fig. 4. Vintage postcard of young Filipina ladies posing with the Manila International Airport (1960s) designed by Federico Ilustre. *Esquire Magazine Philippines*.

the design of the airport terminal that preceded Leandro Locsin's MIA concentrated and focused on how citizens can utilize the public structure in terms of the Filipino native traditions of *pagsalubong* and *paghatid*.¹⁰ In the departures hall, numbers of well-wishers bid their final or temporary farewells as friends, relatives, and family members depart from the country. The arrivals hall is also occupied by people ready to give their warm and festive homecoming for those who are coming back. These are some of the specific Filipino cultures that were embedded in the design of Ilustre's MIA.

During its heyday, the MIA was reported to be the most profitable and the most modern architectural structure in Southeast Asia, at least until the mid-1960s. As an overall structure, the MIA is described by Alcazaren as a "proud product of Filipino architecture and engineering, as well as a showcase of Filipino craftsmanship and public art" (PhilStar.com). Filipinos would congregate and assemble in multitudes at the airport in the first few years

of the newly constructed terminal. Its structure represented and mirrored a country supposedly on the brink of modern innovation and self-sufficiency.

However, due to an unfortunate event, this illusion created by the new terminal lasted for only a few years. In 1972, a great fire ravaged and destroyed a huge portion of the Ilustre-designed MIA. According to The New York Times, “a fire of undetermined origin destroyed the four-story Manila International Airport building” (NYTimes.com). The news further elaborates that the whole building, from ground floor to fourth, including the control tower, was destroyed (NYTimes.com).

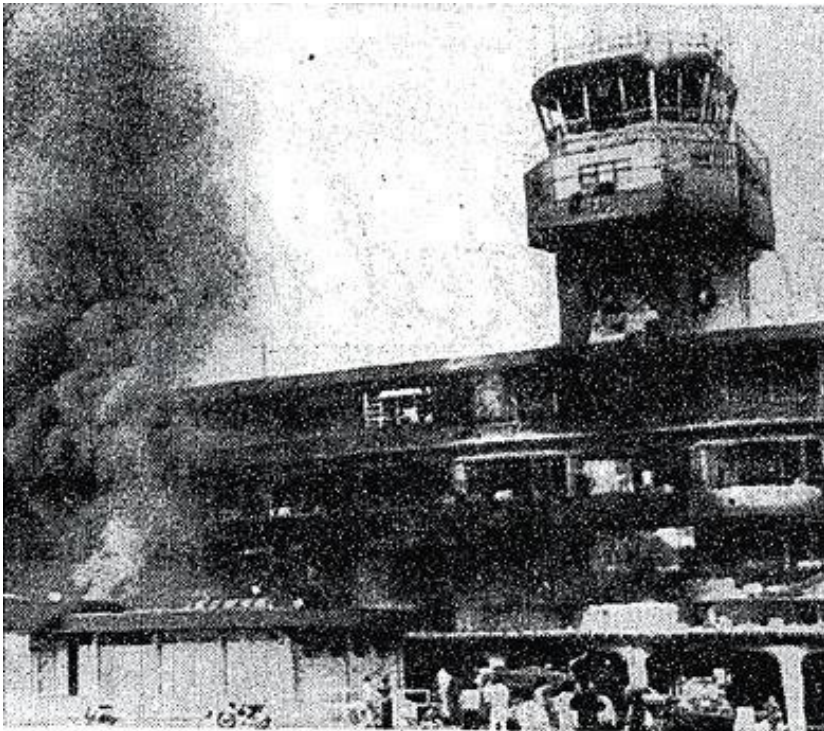


Fig. 5. Terminal of the Manila International Airport was heavily damaged because of a fire from an undetermined origin (1972). The New York Times Archives.

A new one would be built under the auspices of the states, which designated Locsin as designer. As an architect, Locsin demonstrated a specific “awareness on forms and spaces of Filipino architecture” (Polites 12). Since 1966, Imelda Marcos favored Locsin as one of her top architects of choice. Eventually, the Marcoses turned to him and asked him to design many of the regime’s architectural projects such as the infrastructures inside the Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex, most notably the Theater of the Performing Arts, the Folk Arts Theater, the Manila Film Center, and the Philippine International Convention Center (Polites 13).

Eventually, Ferdinand Marcos ordered the development and improvement of the MIA to cater to the aviation needs of the next generation. Locsin used his original concept of a modernized *bahay kubo* or nipa hut for the new airport terminal. The structure followed consistently in the vein of the edifices of *Ang Bagong Lipunan* (New Society) under the aegis and direction of the First Lady Imelda Marcos to modernize the Filipino architectural vernacular. Locsin, much like the other favored architects of the regime, followed this cultural protocol of the First Lady.

For a developing country, building an international airport is a blank canvass for national governments, architectural and urban planning firms, and other vital stakeholders to express current design sensibilities and cultural tastes through a highly-functional structure (Cosgrove 223). International airports also become a palette by which political grandeur is exhibited, all in the name of the state. In a way, these construction projects of airports “engender considerable civic pride and are hence objects of municipal and regional prestige” (Adey et al. 778). The MIA, much like other international airports and gateways around the world, aimed to portray the best that any nation can offer. An international airport functions as the first visual and experiential imprint of the nation. Hence, given these considerations, airport projects eventually become “some of the most celebrated civil works projects of all time” (Maguigad 5). Locsin, however, rendered a brutalist interpretation of the *bahay kubo* that made it unwelcomingly cold, which is quite the opposite of our warm and convivial culture.

Donald Preziosi highlights the significance of historical purpose and usage-context in his architectonic signification of buildings. Spaces and spatialities from the perspective of the familiar and the mundane are seldom evaluated for their independent characteristics and values. However, spatial discourses are more commonly perceived as a specific classification of concepts and ideas that operate as mere backgrounds or as contexts for meaning-construction of other tangential or intersectional objects of inquiry. Elliot Gaines argues that the semiotics of space is a “descriptive process enquiring into the relevant significance of the relationships between objects and their spatial contexts” (174). These facets of spatial discourse deploy “dimensional aspects existing between other, significant phenomena” (Gaines 173). Therefore, whenever spaces are perceived as semiotic phenomena, it can be deduced that the symbolic meaning and function of space, as a sign, becomes “understood in relation to other concerns” (Gaines 175). The fundamental frameworks of such categorical thinking have been established by a number of systematic thinkers that include Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, C.S. Peirce, and Henri Lefebvre.

Lefebvre posits that a spatial code “is not simply a means of reading or interpreting space: rather it is a means of living in that space, of understanding it, and of producing it” (48). Three things make Lefebvre’s spatial semiotics distinct: representations of space, representational spaces, and spatial practice. Representations of space form a “conceptualized space that identifies what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived” (38). To significantly connect these concepts, it is vital to unpack and operationalize the notion of representational spaces. He posits that representational spaces are those that are “directly lived through its associated images and symbols” (39). Moreover, this method of experiencing spaces will only be possible through spatial practice where “people produce, reproduce and change social reality, social space” (40).

In the Lefebvrian sense, the MIA idealized the excesses of the authoritarian regime of Marcos. In terms of purpose and context, the excesses came indirectly by way of imagining and reimagining the public structure as a gateway to the City of Man,¹¹ and its representation. The City of

Man, a project launched by Imelda Marcos as the first governor of Metro Manila, was a rebranding campaign that aimed to reshape the capital of the Philippines. This name was in reference to the cultural operation of reshaping the [capital region] city that “prioritized global tourism, international commerce, economic development, and political power” (Litonjua 370). This chosen nomenclature reinforced the larger movement towards the Marcoses’s idea of a new society. Under this campaign, several urban beautification and development projects were undertaken “to make Manila the world’s center of international tourism and finance” (Lico 34). According to a report from the Asian Development Bank, the project commenced through the approval of a loan amounting to US\$29.6 million in December 1973 (ADB.org). Contradictory to how it was idealized, the MIA discloses (or hides) snippets and elements of the country knowingly or instinctively to passengers traversing its halls.

An airport becomes a cultural showcase for passengers given the privilege to navigate and traverse the halls, gates, and lounges inside the structure. Imelda Marcos wanted to invest and take advantage of this project because, in a sense, this new airport became a “city” inside an architectural structure, even a representation of the “country” (Roseau 38). It revealed the architectonics of excess in that the First Lady wanted the MIA to hold a certain microcosm of the city inside it; a lavish city that she envisioned through extravagant and excessive beautification projects. Much media and press coverage was granted to the First Lady’s disproportionate means of embellishing the city. Considerable amount of publicity was arranged to advertise the accomplishments of government projects by “ascribing it to the President, and the activities of the First Lady, Mrs. Marcos, who is variously describes as *the* patroness of art and culture, *the* foremost social worker, and *the* first in the forefront of the battle against air and water pollution” (Lin 117).

This specific kind of recalibration draws the MIA as *representational space*, or the space of inhabitants and users. It becomes the “passively experienced space, which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate” (Lefebvre 135). These spatial aspects “overlay physical space, making symbolic use of

its objects” (Lefebvre 39). In a sense, the way the MIA was designed, its materials, including the process of how passengers traverse the building were symbolic manifestations of this space. Generally, representational spaces are rooted in history: “the study of the history of thought is crucial to understanding the formation of a representational space in a particular context” (Lefebvre 41).

Meanings are created, produced, and deployed depending on contextual histories. Furthermore, these contexts act and function as various, differentiating, and often conflicting cultures and subcultures within a given society: “both natural and urban spaces are, if anything, over-inscribed: everything therein resembles a rough draft, jumbled and self-contradictory” (Lefebvre 142). In the case of the MIA, the grand vision of the Marcoses establishes the context of this specific built space. However, its architectonics of contradiction and excess reflect how particular features of the MIA both reproduce and counter its original template—the *bahay kubo*. Leandro Locsin’s modernized *bahay kubo* design as applied to the airport’s construction boasted of a level of grandeur and elegance supposedly befitting the regime’s vision for the nation: an economic and political power that will eventually be noticeable in the global stage for architectural feats.

Politics of Exteriority: An Aesthetics of Dictatorship

From an aerial perspective, the terminal looks like a funnel. Locsin’s design of the MIA terminal adheres to the classical architectural pronouncement, “function follows form.” This becomes an important characteristic of the design because it ultimately functions like a funnel that leads passengers from the main departures and arrivals halls onto the respective departures and arrivals gates. Moreover, from the airside, the terminal looks like it is “collecting” aircraft arriving along the tarmac.

One vital function of an airport is to welcome visitors. Its wide, conical mouth from both sides depicts openness—a specific feature that is consistent with the *bahay kubo*. The *bahay kubo* reflects this in two ways: its structural design and the way it echoes the Filipino culture and tradition of openness to other people. However, this funnel design presents a drawback in terms



Fig. 6. An illustration of the native Filipino dwelling, the *bahay kubo* (nipa hut). Photo from John Ryan Recabar.

of constricting flows, or the bottleneck. At the MIA, this piped, narrow stem leading to both mouths functions as controlled areas for channeling and filtering. Such reticence departs from the *bahay kubo* feature of the airport. From the outside, the design reflects openness and spaciousness but once departing passengers clear their check-in formalities, they are channeled through immigration and security checks where such control bottlenecks happen. Moreover, a labyrinth-like interior follows security check.

As if traversing through a maze of novelty and gift shops, tributaries then lead to different gates for boarding. It is also true upon arrival. Upon disembarkation, passengers go through tight, directed halls for immigration, baggage collection, and customs. These processes follow the functionality of the funnel. But, again, it deviates from the *bahay kubo* concept. The constricted hallways and low elevation in areas in between the departures hall and boarding gates make the interior of the airport disorienting and



Fig. 7. Locsin's *bahay kubo* design as applied in the new terminal construction of the Manila International Airport. Left: Construction of the new Manila International Airport terminal that started in 1978. Right: Completed structure of the Manila International Airport.

almost harrowing for passengers. This feeling of constriction or compression departs from the *bahay kubo*'s promise of openness.

The *bahay kubo*'s important feature includes the complementary relationship of "spaciousness and openness" (Perez et al. 11). Such concepts may be further discussed in terms of the Filipino notion of *aliwalas*. It is used to describe a space that is clean, open, and pleasant. But the idea of spaciousness that Locsin wanted was that of awe and magnificence, and yet discounting the previous conventions. In a way, this could also augment its excessiveness: dysfunctional spaciousness. At the outset, the MIA promises both features but its interior space speaks differently.

Architecturally, the MIA has been described "as an extension of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Complex" because of its design concept (Maguigad 19). Before reaching the airport terminal, the elevated approach from the Airport Road to the departures hall gives the similar sense of approach to the Main Theater of Performing Arts inside the CCP Complex from Roxas Boulevard in Pasay City. People are brought up to the departures hall of the terminal by a curving ramp that follows the perimeter of the elliptical shape of the parking area. On one hand, this can reflect elitism, or may give off a feeling that travel during that time was only for the privileged.



Fig. 8. Front view of the Theater of the Performing Arts inside the Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex, designed by National Artist for Architecture, Leandro Locsin. Photo by Paul Blasco.

From the outside, the terminal is perceived as a tri-level, inverted isosceles trapezoid elongated to the whole length of the structure that curves slightly to make a concave-shaped façade. The arrivals hall at the base of the terminal grows out from the ground to support the entire monumental structure. The travertine blocks, materials used for the exterior of the structure, are suspended and elevated into the air by strongly arched beams that support it, so that it appears to “float in suspension above the base podium” (Polites 25). This design gives the visitor (or passenger) the feeling of astonishment and admiration upon realizing that such a small elevation from the floor to the ceiling of the opening is very tight, and yet once you enter, massive space welcomes the visitor.

Looking at the external design of the MIA, the ramp that leads to the departures area is reminiscent of the entrance to the *bahay kubo*—both are elevated from the ground and the only means to go inside both structures is through the stairs, or in the airport’s case, the elevated approach. The cantilever block that overhangs at the entrance of the departures hall exudes the balcony and balcony roofing of the traditional *bahay kubo*. The balcony of the *bahay kubo* is located on a lower plane than the living room (Alarcon 42). In

a way, the entrance of the airport becomes its balcony that leads to the main departures hall. It is interesting to note that in cases where the *bahay kubo* is located by a riverbank or any body of water, an important part is the *daungan* [harbor] (Dacanay 24).

One reaches the *bahay kubo* coming from the harbor where the house owner docks and anchors their boat. The owner then passes through the front yard and walks into the entrance door leading to the kitchen and the dining room. There is an entry door to the house proper as the elevated living area is already “enclosed” by the roofed *silong* [basement] (Hila et al. 201). In a way, the harbor functions as the most important exterior space as it “heralds the arrival and departure of guests and neighbors as well as the husband going and coming from the day’s fishing work” (Hila et al. 202). Looking at the exterior spaces of the airport, the side of the terminal for both the departures and arrivals displays this ‘harbor’ concept. The balcony, reached through the elevated ramp, both welcomes and bids farewell to those who are embarking on their journey, regardless of the purpose. The air-bridges that connect the aircraft to the arrival hall become spaces for welcoming visitors and *balikbayans* [Filipinos visiting or returning to the Philippines] back.

The fragment of the airport that partitions the outside and inside—the windows—also reflect certain features of the *bahay kubo*. Generally, the design of the *bahay kubo* limits the use of windows because “the space between the walls and the eaves already constitute one continuous window” (Hila et al. 194). This functional design is utilized “to provide a vantage point of perspective coming from the front yard” (Alarcon 16). This flowing nature of visual continuity, together with openness and spaciousness (as discussed in the earlier parts of this section) are vital features of the *bahay kubo*. The windows inside the terminal emanate the *pasamano* [windowsills] of the *bahay kubo*. However, the departures hall has no windows, giving it a constricted feeling of inescapability and confinement. It is ironic how the airport, the initial gateway of an “escape” for Filipino OCWs toward a better life, renders a feeling of inescapability.

After clearing immigration and security check, the hallways that lead to the boarding gates are lined-up with windows. The tilted and slanted design of the windows contributes to the inverted isosceles trapezoid shape of the structure. The windows from the halls leading to the boarding gates are wide-set, following the whole length of the hallways, thus exuding the outside environment as extensions of the structure. The windows surrounding the boarding gates follow the same design of that in the hallways. This continuity contributes to the overall consistency of the structure in terms of design.

Architectonics of Interiority: Designing the Interiors of a Nation

In his book titled *The Semiotics of the Built Environment*, Preziosi posits that “architectonic objects function territorially by staging behavioral routines or episodes, framing interpersonal interactions, and dividing, structuring, delimiting, or zoning an environment” (65). This means that spaces are divided into territories depending on the main function or purpose of the building.

In the case of airports, this zoning is critical because of issues on security, efficiency, and governmentality. This is also one of the reasons why Augé deems the airport a non-place as the systems and organization inside them are virtually the same (63). The airport, as Augé argues, is a distinctive non-place of travel. It is “just a provisional space on the worldwide network of air travel” (101). However, the MIA departs from how airports are conceived by Augé as its zoning is made unique because of the politics of passenger presence. For instance, in the case of the MIA, a huge percentage of passengers are the Filipino overseas workers. I have chosen to refer to them as OCWs because it was a category which Marcos crafted himself.

The paper expands the arguments by showing how special lanes and zones for OCWs function as spaces of abuse. Preziosi mentions how “social, ethnic, economic, or religious ties” affect the movement inside airports (*Semiotics* 65). For passengers who are not OCWs, the airport space is merely a transition from one place to another, from one border to the next.

However, based on the experiences of OCWs, it becomes a jump-off point to a better life given the social and economic status of most of these workers. Filipino OCWs remain to be the category who is most victimized inside airport spaces. Their narratives contribute to the contemporary discussions and issue of uneven mobilities. According to Sparke, contemporary mobilities exhibit the stark “contrast between frequent flyers [for business and leisure purposes] and the underprivileged ‘kinetic underclass’ [who are] subject to intensive forms of security control” (169). These formations articulate social topology that is produced and reproduced inside the MIA.

Locsin, one of the favored architects of the regime, designed the entrance lobby going to the departures hall as a “hollowed-out interior sculpture of continuous flowing lines” (Polites 17). In the original design, he decided to encase the panels, walls, and pillars of the terminal in molded concrete for better aesthetic projection. The polished marble floors complement and play against the chiseled, soft-textured concrete of the walls and pillars. Exuding the upper level of a *bahay kubo*, the mezzanine floor hangs over the balcony on both sides of the departures hall with windows opening up the view of the ground floor where passengers queue for check-in.

While Locsin extended the concept of the *bahay kubo* in terms of its functionalism, such heavy materials used evoke bulkiness and coldness. One of the monumental works of Locsin made use of a material he championed: the concrete. However, the use of concrete as its main material contradicts the main features of the humble, native structure it is supposedly modeled after.

The *bahay kubo*, a symbol that welcomes and champions the vernacular culture of the country, monumentalized the modernistic inflection and cultural showcase of the regime. However, it only does so to an extent that benefits the elite. The airport reflects an openness that is constricting. The openness, established by the funnel-shaped structure of the terminal, achieves its promise only until the departures hall. Anywhere else inside the terminal, the elevation becomes lower. Moreover, the number of passengers passing through immigration, security check, baggage claim, customs, and the arrivals hall causes a sense of compression and tightening.

Today, the decision of assigning special lanes for OCWs added to this unnecessary “compression.” The number of leaving and arriving OCWs takes up significant space because their concentration in just one or two lanes proves to be insufficient. These special lanes, seemingly established to give importance to the modern-day heroes, act as funnels to focus on OCWs who are leaving and returning to the country. Various reasons come to mind as to the creation of these special lanes. For one, their check-in process differs from ordinary passengers because of the quantity of luggage and baggage carried.

In terms of immigration, OCWs are required specific documents before passing through immigration. The stricter review of documents and policies regarding foreign workers causes bottlenecks on the part of the terminal. This kind of compression and tightening of spaces also happen inside the boarding area where the limited seats force passengers to squat on floors while waiting to embark. Upon arrival, luggage and baggage expected by passengers are by bulk and huge boxes. The narrow allowance from one baggage carousel to another contributes to this feeling of constraint. While passengers weave through trolleys, luggage, boxes, the number of people overflows to customs where officers become more particular with the baggage carried by the passengers. As passengers exit from the terminal, the low elevation and limited space offered by the arrival lobby intensify as lined-up vehicles greet them. Across the parked vehicles, people wait for the arriving party, cramped inside a small space where railings enclose the section.

The interior configuration of the MIA, then, can be described in terms of seemingly contradictory concepts of openness and constriction. From the outside, with its panoramic, single-span façade, the structure reveals a huge, geometric building that has three solid blocks on top of each other. These “floating blocks” that are characteristic of Locsin’s design concept, give a sense of tight elevations inside the terminal (Polites 20). In a way, this illusion of tight openings renders vital in surprising passengers once they enter through the low-elevated cantilever entrance.

The amazement and awe-inspiring openness of the departure lobby promises the same, consistent design throughout the terminal. However, passengers find themselves amidst labyrinths and maze-like spaces filled with walls, establishments, and people. Such illusion and promise reflect the Marcosian rhetoric in terms of empty, hollow promises propelled by their propaganda, i.e., *Ang Bagong Lipunan* promising a better society for the citizenry. The Marcoses promoted grand narratives of the family and dwelling places that form part of the promise but ended up disappointing the greater majority. In a sense, the feeling of astonishment upon entering the terminal quickly disappears as the feeling of constriction overtakes the initial sense of awe and wonder.

This proves how the aesthetic drama and narrative of both the MIA and the Marcoses's *Ang Bagong Lipunan* are, in the end, empty and hollow. Even the modernized transformation of the humble *bahay kubo* did not live up to its functionality. The vernacular dwelling of the ordinary folk changed excessively through opulence and lavishness during the MIA's conceptualization and its main features of spaciousness and functionality were not delivered.

In his other book titled *Architecture, Language, and Meaning*, Preziosi argues "[the] house is not a 'machine for living' but a system for the production of meaning by its user(s)" (75). In terms of discussing the house, Preziosi does not only consider its purpose as a mere shelter where it mechanically functions for the borders. He critically points out how the signification of the house and other architectural structures "goes beyond formal configuration and structure and the physical or material variations" (*Architecture* 75). This significantly links the concept of simplicity and complexity of the *bahay kubo* mentioned in the previous section of the paper. However, his argument does not explain how this production of meaning is achieved when designs are used as templates for the purpose of another structure.

When mentioning the OCW experiences inside the airport, it is important to understand how the airport has become charged with emotions based on how passengers acquaint themselves inside the building. Majority of passengers inside the MIA are OCWs and they are able to modify their

perspective of the space based on their experiences from the departures hall, security check, immigration, customs, until the arrivals hall. Preziosi argues that an “architectonic system is a system of relationships, not of forms or materials” (*Architecture* 113). Hence, this vision and version of the airport, inspired by the functionality of the indigenous *bahay kubo*, ultimately fail amidst the ostentatious design.

Reading the Cognates of the *Bahay-Kubo*

More than the aesthetics and spatial function of the *bahay kubo*, it can be argued that other cognates of the *bahay kubo* can also be applied in analyzing the MIA. One of the factors that affect the construction of the *bahay kubo* is the “body of beliefs pertaining to the chosen site and rituals observed” before, during, and after the construction (Dacanay 18). These traditional folk rituals and beliefs guarantee not only good and prosperous health for those who are residing within the household and a wealthy, joyful family life but also fortification and assurance of safety from evil spirits and bad omens for both the occupants and the people engaged in the house-building effort. Hence, Dacanay argues that the *bahay kubo* of the ethnic architect becomes “an embodiment of the culture and unique behavioral patterns of a people within a particular social organization and worldview” (19).

It also functions as an expression both of the individual needs of the people in response to the environment and of the bigger narrative of communities respectively. The *bahay kubo* relates these different social dimensions and is a part of a bigger community setting. As mentioned earlier, two traditional, almost ritualistic acts that happen inside the MIA are the *hatid* (well-wishing) and the *salubong* (welcoming back home).

Salubong stems from familial tradition. A *pagsalubong* in the airport varies from time to time and among social classes. The practice of welcoming *balikbayans* back home differs particularly from the West. The concept of the *balikbayan* is rooted in the idea that a country’s borders do not confine identity, belonging, and culture. The term *balikbayan* is actually three words in one—*balik* is “to return,” *bayan* is “nation” (or home), and, when these two words are combined, the third term is born—*balikbayan*.

The word also has two meanings. As a noun, it means someone who returns home, and as a verb, it is the act of returning home. In food, language, tradition, and stories, Filipinos continue to strive to preserve the identity and culture of their mother country but have also adapted to changes that come from new places they call home. Specific traits and acts done by *balik-bayans* have become repetitive; hence, these practices have become rituals and practices that function as mirrors or antecedents of Filipino culture and identity.

In the Philippine context and tradition, Filipino returnees and foreign visitors have been welcomed through a barrage of cultural spectacles. Throughout the airport terminal, musicians and dancers are designated to perform the *rondalla* and *kumparsa*.¹² These are two of the most famous forms of traditional Filipino music. Nowadays, these types of music are typically performed during special occasions such as shows and festivals. These jovial routines, accompanied by the sight of employees from Duty Free Shops donning their full Filipiniana dresses, become a cultural performance and act for arriving and departing passengers in the airports.

The now-defunct *Nayong Pilipino*¹³ or the Philippine Village, originally built near the MIA in order to entertain passengers while waiting for their flights or transfers, wanted to showcase the different cultures of the country. Contemporary airports are envisioned as a prefiguration of the city where they are located. As such, airports were often “linked by rail or metro, and was surrounded by parks and urban amenities such as trade fairs, hotels, shops, aviation schools, and so on” (Adey et al. 41). According to Cabalfin, the identity politics articulated by such architectural structures “distills the essence of the country into its irreducible elements [and] can produce ideas of how the nation is articulated through theme parks” (27). However, the problem in this process is the politics of representation. As in the case of the *Nayong Pilipino*, the creation of the master plans and exhibits was given to a select and elite group of people, often hired or commissioned by the government. The narratives depicted were based on official directives from Imelda Marcos herself.

These spectacles and edifices are performative and built articulations of how the regime wanted to articulate Philippine culture not only to foreigners but to locals as well. However, these manufactured efforts masked the real situation of *Ang Bagong Lipunan*. Just like the concrete fences that were built in order to conceal the slum areas surrounding the airport area, blinders that will make it seem that the country was a progressive nation were ratified by the Marcoses.

Almost a year after the opening of the MIA's terminal in 1982, its tarmac or runway became a witness to the climactic moment that eventually led to the fall of the Marcos regime—the assassination in 1983 of Senator Benigno Aquino, the face of the opposition, who had just returned on board a China Airlines flight from exile. It is primarily for this reason that, by virtue of Republic Act 6639, the MIA has been renamed Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) in order to give due reverence for the late senator's patriotism and martyrdom for democracy. The MIA remains a stark reminder of how the tragedy in the tarmac began the fate of *Ang Bagong Lipunan*'s terminal. Aquino's homecoming, no matter how tragically it ended, sparked the People Power Revolution against *Ang Bagong Lipunan*, thus restoring democracy. Aquino's arrival toppled the old regime and created a new democratic space.

The Marcosian Inflection: Deprecating the Family Rhetoric

Banking on pure spectacle, the romantic and dramatic narrative of the Marcoses continued as they mythologized their parental and messianic image through cultural endeavors. The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos established not only the image of power and elegance, but strived to propel the rhetoric of the nation as a family under the banner of mythologized parents.

The Marcoses shared a communal vision about themselves. Their sense of destiny was so pronounced that they compared themselves to *Malakas* (strong) and *Maganda* (beautiful), the first Filipino man and woman who as legend has it, emerged from a single bamboo stalk. The logic behind this narcissistic desire was to satisfy their supposed destiny: promoting a kind

of renewal of national identity and such visual works make obvious their ambition to be part of the national mythology (Rafael 595). Following this analogy, they believed that they were at the “origin of all that was new in the Philippines” (Ellison 79). They regarded their privileged positions as an allowance for them to cross and recalibrate all boundaries that included the social, political, and cultural. The use of the *Malakas* and *Maganda* myth permitted the Marcoses to reconstruct themselves as “ideal helpmates governing the nation as though it were a mythical household” (Ellison 82). With the creation of *Ang Bagong Lipunan*, the Marcosian wish to be the parents to the Filipino people was given a stronger institutional basis.

However, the darker, more sinister side of this narrative came in the form of oligarchy and crony capitalism. Marcos’ authoritarian rule “was built around extensive state patronage networks and the creation of a class of rent-seeking capitalist” (Hawes 51). As crony capitalism progressed, the economy suffered and brought about economic and financial crisis from 1981 to 1985. The former President removed the old oligarchs but installed new oligarchs, and the promise of greatness offered by *Ang Bagong Lipunan* was reserved only for the elite and the powerful—the cronies of the Conjugal Dictatorship.

The financial contribution of OCWs, through their remittances, proved vital for the salvaging of the weakening economy of the country. OCWs were tagged *bagong bayani* or modern-day heroes because of the sacrifices they make for the family, and eventually, the country. For instance, in the introduction essay of Odine De Guzman’s collection of OCW poems entitled *From Saudi with Love: 100 Poems by OFWs*, she maintains that working in other countries seems to have become “the only option left” for Filipino families to experience a good life back home (1). She purports that “while many OFWs who come home are nostalgic of past economic comforts afforded by working abroad, some were without fond memories, others yet have no memories at all” (De Guzman 3).

According to De Guzman, most of the poems were submitted in literary contests sponsored by Overseas Filipino Press Club where it gave an opportunity for OCW writers “to examine their relationships with their family and the nation-state and to make these usually private musings public” (14).

She initiated this study of poems produced by overseas Filipino workers who as a class or sector would not have thought of writing at all. The concept of literature and social change encouraged OCWs to express their experiences through poetry. Her efforts were “directed at retrieving the literature (both written and oral) of the dispossessed and the marginalized” (De Guzman 16).

In a sense, OCWs participate in the nation-state differently. During the time of Ferdinand Marcos, the OCWs became tools to curb the unemployment rate and to improve economic stagnation through their remittances. Now, through their literary works, they also produce writings about their concerns regarding the country and their families as they explore their selfhood as it relates to citizenship.

Airports are always packed during the holidays because it is a time dedicated for the family. For the MIA, now officially called NAIA, its arrivals hall becomes a witness to a multitude of homecomings. Even commercials, product promotions, and advertisements focus on the plurality of homecomings via the airport such as those of Max’s Fried Chicken and Globe Communication. Still grounded on the narrative of the family, these commercials depict the arrivals hall as the immediate nexus of home, both in its national and familial sense. It becomes the first interface with the motherland and it is where families wait for the one returning. More often than not, these commercials depict OCWs, returning home to spend Christmas with the family.

But what is not highlighted in these commercials is the fact that even before OCWs get to finally exit the terminal and experience their full return, the country already has a different kind of welcoming prepared for them—confusion inside a constricted building, possible corruption from immigration and customs officers, mismanagement of archaic machines, and the outdated terminal complex itself. One of the most recent controversies included the *laglag-bala* [drop bullet] or *tanim-bala* [plant bullet] scandals. According to a news article written by Constante, airport security personnel were alleged “to have planted bullets inside the luggage of passengers in order to extort money from them” (AsianJournal.com). According to Carvajal, most of the victims were profiled as overseas Filipino workers and the elderly because

“OFWs are easily duped and the elderly easily get nervous” (PressReader.com). Specified lanes are now installed for the special treatment of OCWs (because they are modern-day heroes). But in reality, these lanes are installed to make it easier for officers to harass and take advantage of OCWs. These are all symptoms of a larger narrative of corruption and manipulation that disillusioned the nation.

The return of these workers to their places of work abroad reflects how this cycle of departure and arrival becomes a perpetual means for supporting a government that heavily relies on OCW remittances but neglects to prioritize their welfare. Moreover, the abuses directed toward the so-called modern-day heroes inside the airport continue to haunt the OCWs both upon departure and upon arrival. The airport functions as an enabler of a particular kind of spatial interrogation inside a space that was supposedly built as a homage to the Filipino home.

Conclusion

The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos extended their vision of *Ang Bagong Lipunan* to monumental edifices such as the architectural buildings within the CCP Complex, medical and health infrastructure, and structural facilities for transportation and mobility. Part of these edifices included the MIA. These grand structures, commissioned by the state through her patronage “were indicative of a modern, uncluttered, monumental architecture associated with prestige state construction in the industrial West” to “encapsulate, dignify, and display a cultural heritage that was uniquely Filipino” (Lico 14). Hence, the modernistic rendering of the native dwelling, the *bahay kubo* or the nipa hut, became the design concept for one of the regime’s preferred architects, Leandro Locsin.

Locsin applied the modern *bahay kubo* concept for the terminal design for functionality and aesthetics. However, the humble dwelling place of vernacular Philippines became extravagant and ostentatious for the sake of monumentalizing the regime. The promise of functionality and warmth that the vernacular *bahay kubo* possesses became secondary. In a way, even if the design basis of the MIA that was grounded on the concepts of modernizing

the vernacular Filipino dwelling was achieved, the lived experiences and spatial culture of the airport prove that it failed to reflect the true essence of where the structure was originally based—the *bahay kubo*.

During the time of the Marcoses, the MIA functioned as a gateway for international leaders and foreign dignitaries. The opulent design of the airport wanted to show these visitors how progressive the country was under the regime. But the experiences of OCWs offered a distinct interrogation not only of the spatial function of the airport, but ultimately, of the larger narrative of *Ang Bagong Lipunan*.

MIA functioned not just as a gateway for foreign and international visitors and dignitaries to get a taste of the City of Man, but also solidified the edifice complex of the regime. It became a getaway for Filipinos to render service elsewhere. It became a tool for sending out Filipino citizens to other countries, which bolstered the OCW wave. In the Lefebvrian sense, the Marcosian architectonic represents *spatial practice*—the perceived notions that bring about patterns inside the respective physical space (38).

The airport, particularly its interior calibration of space, embraces the production and reproduction of what was conceived. The airport ensured continuity of ideals propelled by the Marcoses. The narrative of these architectural edifices of the regime, specifically MIA, is meant to instigate a kind of nationalism that *Ang Bagong Lipunan* purports: associating self-sacrifice of the common folks for the good of the nation and the state.

This myth creates a “unified image that gives tangibility to the promise of a national architecture and imagination of a nation” (Lico 161). Through public, state-initiated architectural structures of *Ang Bagong Lipunan* such as the MIA (and the produced spaces thereafter), the regime continually played out a national narrative and cultural memory, that was both fantasized and constructed.

Notes

1. Primitivo Mijares coined the phrase “conjugal dictatorship” to denote the regime of former Philippine president and dictator Ferdinand Marcos and his First Lady, Imelda Marcos. In his book entitled *The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos and Imelda Marcos* (1976), Mijares unpacks how the phrase described the kind of power and influence held by the First Couple. A huge portion of the book discusses how Imelda Marcos wielded and maintained a more powerful influence than that of a quintessential First Lady. She held many government positions and these appointments permitted her to commission several architectural structures and buildings within Metro Manila, including the Manila International Airport. The phrase also highlights how the excessive means of the regime, through plunder and corruption, was made possible by this kind of family dictatorship, cronyism, and oligarchy.
2. *Ang Bagong Lipunan* or the New Society was established by Ferdinand Marcos. He discussed in his book *An Ideology for Filipinos* (1983) the meanings of the social theories based on Marxism, Leninism, and Maoism that eventually led him to form this New Society (Marcos 13-36). Ferdinand Marcos endorsed these social theories which have been appropriated in the Philippines, and, for him, shall have the potency to bring about social change for future generations. According to Litonjua, this ‘new society’ presumes a nation wherein “all Filipinos would equitably share in the benefits of economic development and progress” (368).
3. The *bahay kubo* or the native nipa hut is a traditional stilt house indigenous to the Philippines. Its design and architectural principles paved the way to various iterations of Philippine traditional houses and structures beyond the precolonial period. Even before the colonial era, the *bahay kubo* has been utilized as the native house of indigenous people living in the Philippines. These houses were designed to functionally accommodate the tropical and humid climate of the islands while enduring the country’s equally harsh environment. However, these structures were temporary, as they were usually made from plant materials such as bamboo and various parts of the coconut plant (Kim 135).
4. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, the term “excess” is defined as “an amount of something that is more than necessary, permitted, or desirable; lack of moderation in an activity; exceeding desirable amount.” In this paper, the term is operationalized to reflect an aesthetics of excess articulated by the Marcosian regime: unnecessarily extravagant edifices, opulent designs, lavish loans, unrestricted power and influence, and unrestrained spectacles for cultural performativities. While architecture aims for both function and communica-

- tion, the immoderate amounts spent on Marcosian edifices raise the question— is it necessary?
5. During Locsin’s time, most architects trusted the architectural education and theories that lean more towards Western designs. Such cognizance was attributed to Locsin’s “growing up in a culturally-rich environment such as Silay [in Negros Occidental]” (Paredes-Santillan 3). His usage of concrete produced feats of daring and ingenious designs. From that moment on, Locsin felt that concrete as a material became the best option for any architecture that arose as a response to Philippine conditions. Locsin’s projects displayed certain similar characteristics: “a lightness of form, an airiness and grace lent by the slender, tapering columns, the thin sunscreens, and the almost weightless balconies and overhangs” (Polites 11).
 6. Built before World War II, it was considered to be the first commercial airfield in Manila. It was first used locally by Philippine Aerial Taxi Company to service light aircrafts to Loakan Airfield in Baguio. In September 1944, American aircraft carriers and bombers attacked Grace Park Airfield, much like other airfields and shipping installations in Manila (Allied Geographical Section 39). Eventually, it was disused and developed into an industrial area. It remained to function as an airfield until at least 1946 (Allied Geographical Section 40). It is now the Grace Park Subdivision, located in the middle of an urbanized area, where there are no longer traces of the air strip.
 7. Built as an airfield by the Americans during the prewar years, Nielson Airfield was named after a New Zealander businessman and aviation enthusiast, Laurie Reuben Nielson. It was initially used as a civilian airport by the American Far Eastern Aviation and Philippine Airlines (Allied Geographical Section 38-39). In 1947, Nielson Airfield was eventually closed and was later used for commercial development (Maurer 21). Today, the original tower and the air terminal building are operated by the Ayala Museum.
 8. Paulo Alcazaren, “Manila’s International Airport: Gateway to the World.” *The Philippine Star*. 10 Nov. 2001. www.philstar.com/modern-living/139620/manila%C2%92s-international-airport-gateway-world. Accessed 28 July 2021.
 9. Paulo Alcazaren, “Portal of the Jet Age.” *The Philippine Star*. 8 Jan. 2016. www.philstar.com/lifestyle/modern-living/2016/01/08/1540557/portal-jet-age. Accessed 28 July 2021.
 10. The terms *pagsundo* and *paghatid* are cultural traditions of Filipinos when accompanying family members, relatives, or friends to the airport either to see them off or welcome them home. *Sundo* means to pick-up the arriving passenger from the airport’s arrivals halls. *Hatid* means to see them off to their respective flights. Just like many airport terminals, there are designated spaces and areas for well-wishers.

11. Under Imelda Marcos' vision, the elements of the City of Man included the architectural structures inside the Cultural Center of the Philippines Complex and the medical and health infrastructures such as the Lung Center of the Philippines, the Kidney Center of the Philippines, and the Philippine Heart Center. These Imeldific edifices were commissioned, designed, and constructed in order to solidify and concretize the Marcosian City of Man (Lico 12).
12. The *rondalla* is a famous form of traditional Filipino music. The *rondalla* is a type of traditional ensemble made up of several types of string instruments of various sizes. *Rondalla* is more formal and dramatic. The Filipino *rondalla* has a wide repertoire ranging from the simple folk songs to the modern and contemporary tunes as well as Filipino and foreign classics (Roces 34). The *rondalla* as a Filipino musical form has become an "institution" and has made its "distinct contribution to the musical culture of the nation" (Roces 40).
13. The *Nayong Pilipino*, also known as the Philippine Village, was originally conceptualized by Former First Lady Imelda Marcos to showcase various Filipino cultures and traditions. Opened in 1970, it was a cultural theme park located beside the Manila International Airport. It was popularly advertised as the first of its kind in the Southeast Asian region.

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