



The image of Kidlat Tahimik and his works in his home country is much more diversified and multipolar than what an outside observer, one from overseas (specifically the West), can immediately fathom. In an important respect, it is appropriate to name Kidlat's works underground, not so much for their aesthetics but for the persistent inaccessibility and the lack of actual knowledge about his works by what ought to be his primary audience. To many Filipinos, including his peer filmmakers, Kidlat's films are much more hearsay than firsthand spectacle. For the time being, Kidlat's opus remains the phantom of the arthouse cinema.

Thus—from the perspective of a lot of people in his own country—the veneration Kidlat receives from his Western followers seems like a kind of mystery, a misunderstanding, if not a product of naïve romanticism. Or is it simply another case of “a prophet is without honor in his own country”? On the other hand, there is also a broad consensus in the Philippines about the importance of Kidlat Tahimik's body of work. Given the long course and discourse of enshrinement on Kidlat as the founder, patron saint, and savior of the independent and alternative cinema in the Philippines, some questions need to be addressed.

A welcome approach and good guideline to describe and to understand a foreign culture seems to be immersion combined with a survey to let the subjects of the study present their respective personal point of view in the context and against the background of their individual situation. This might be a good guideline for a less neo-orientalistic mode of interpretation for multilayered and multiplexed internal discourses on this specific topic. By doing so, we quite possibly will find ourselves in a better position to describe and to understand discourses, networks, and the inherent mechanics and dynamics of internal cultural exchange. The support of oral history will help to establish a more complex picture of the subject of our interest. Therefore, off to the Philippines to experience how the players involved describe their very own milieus in regard to Kidlat Tahimik.

### ATO BAUTISTA

I started studying film in 2000 at Mowelfund Film Institute. One of the films archived there that filmmakers used to watch is Kidlat's *Perfumed Nightmare* (1977), his most popular work. I watched the whole thing and never forgot about it. I was blown away by its ambition and aesthetics. I was amazed at how free and creative it was. Back then, I did not know what it had achieved. I appreciated the film because it was so different. It defied boundaries. And the fact that it was done in the 1970s was amazing. Many experimental filmmakers got ideas from it.

You can say I'm a fan of Kidlat. His film affected me as a viewer. But as a filmmaker, I wasn't exactly influenced by his film. All in all, I'm a film noir guy who does popular cinema. I have my own aesthetics; the style of Kidlat is completely his. Some other filmmakers could probably get a few magic tricks from his works. But I never thought about using his style or techniques or paying homage. It was more a revelation that things can be done that way.

It opened my mind. I appreciate how it was filmed, and the way the story moved from one point to another with surprises. I appreciate the satire of how a brown man brought a jeepney to Paris, how it crossed from realism, fantasy, to absurdity, and to whatever it was. It mixed up so many elements, and so many genres. It blew me away. I got the same feeling when I saw Lav Diaz's *Heremias* (2006). I thought that this guy is a genius because he thought or he perceived that something like that can be done.

I don't think that Kidlat has an influence in the broad sense. As a novice filmmaker, if you study film history, there is an 80 percent chance that you will encounter his name and his works and be exposed to what he did. He's one of the major influencers of experimental cinema in the Philippines, mostly in the '80s and '90s. But, of course, it's not exclusively Kidlat Tahimik. While experimental filmmaking in the Philippines is not very popular, there are many other independent and experimental filmmakers who have pushed the form in the last 30 years. Back then, there was no independent filmmaking; there was just alternative and experimental filmmaking. When I began working as a filmmaker in 2000, the term “independent filmmaking” was not used. It was an obscure profession. We called it guerilla filmmaking.

Kidlat's influence on young filmmakers nowadays is quite limited, I'd say. This influence is limited to the guys in Manila. How could somebody like Kidlat influence filmmaking in the regions? The influence of artists on other people breaks down to the availability and visibility of their works. It's that simple. Outside the National Capital Region, the only influence is mainstream cinema. Because besides special screening opportunities in schools, there are no alternative venues. It's an irony in a way. If independent filmmakers like us want to influence the regions, it should be done intentionally. But I don't think this is one of Kidlat's intentions. He's always in Baguio with his family and his own group. His films are private, and he chooses to stay private.



### SIGRID ANDREA BERNARDO

I first saw a Kidlat Tahimik film when I was working for Lav Diaz on *Ebolusyon ng Pamilyang Pilipino* (2004). We were shooting in Baguio. The team hung out in Oh My Gulay, Kidlat's restaurant, and watched one of his films. I remember thinking, “Oh, films are made like this.” It was a big surprise! I was only 19 at that time and didn't know much about filmmaking. I didn't quite understand what Kidlat's film was about. But I like films that focus on the feelings of their audience.

We have what we call semiotics in theater, like symbolism and actions even without stories. I saw that kind of technique in Kidlat's film. The story was not done with the usual beginning, middle, and end. Instead, it was constructed from snippets of everyday lives. Buy you could still somehow grasp a whole story from it. In this regard, when you watch a film by Kidlat, there's no right or wrong answer. It's free for everyone to make something out of it.

Watching Kidlat's *Balikbayan #1* (2015) is like going back to my roots. It reminds me of Lav Diaz's *Ebolusyon*. I like the kind of rawness these films have, as well as themany feelings and ideas in them. But I don't think it's for everyone. It might be hard for some people to digest because it's different from what they are used to in their cinematic diet. But if you have no expectations when you go to the theater, then you might appreciate it. You just have to feel it. It's like going back to your childhood. That's the feel of Kidlat's films.

I do believe that kids should watch more experimental films like Kidlat's. Its abstract form makes you create your own story out of it. You interpret. You play with it. It's not just given away. So many kids have a short attention span. They have no patience. It's better that they watch experimental films as early as possible. It's visually interesting. It makes your imagination work. It teaches children, even toddlers, not





to be lazy and create their own answers. The kid's mind has no rules. It doesn't pay much attention to the plausibility of a story. Give them Kidlat's films!

I don't know what kind of influence Kidlat had when he started filmmaking. First of all, making *Perfumed Nightmare* was expensive. For that reason, not many independent filmmakers in the Philippines back then had been able to follow his example. Then again, his example shows that if you want to be a director, then there's no reason that you can't be a director. You just make use of whatever resources you have. Kidlat wanted to explore and create different styles. He was experimenting on camera. It's like he's painting in abstract form. Even if his films are personal, they are not self-centered. That's what makes his works unique. It's his way of communicating.

The meaning of being a Filipino is you're born here, is raised here, and you grew up in an environment that embraces Filipino culture. I appreciate Kidlat's regionality, even if he's only an adopted Ifugao. He promotes this culture with a lot of effort. I envy him for that. Seeing him wearing the *babag* makes me feel proud of our culture.

### DERICK CABRIDO

The first time I saw a film by Kidlat Tahimik was back when I was still in college in 2001 or 2002. = One of my classmates attended Kidlat Tahimik's seminar. I joined one of those classes at the University of the Philippines (UP) in Diliman. I recognized that Kidlat is a very good teacher.

Back then, I wanted to do documentaries very much. Kidlat did a couple of documentaries. However, I found them a bit boring, and I didn't want to follow his kind of filmmaking. I cannot say that I'm influenced by Kidlat. Don't get me wrong, I respect his works. I can see where he's coming from and where he's right now in terms of his aesthetics and point of view. But I can't say that this is going to be something you need or something that counts for Philippine cinema at this point in time. But this is less a problem of Kidlat. The avenue of Philippine cinema is limited.

The basic problem here in the Philippines is access. Up to now, so many seminal works are not that easy to access. We lack the archival infrastructure. At the same time, it's a problem of promotion and marketing. How are you going to market films like his? How are you going to screen outside the festival and university circles for public viewing? Kidlat's films are unique. They have their own voice. We should have different voices. To understand and to recognize this is what Kidlat and his work are all about. The younger generations have an idea of him because he's part of their textbooks and the history of Philippine cinema. But how do you explain that he is the father of the independent cinema in the Philippines when it is hard to find even one of Kidlat's films anywhere in the whole country? Because of this, Kidlat's influence on the Philippine film scene as a whole, even on the contemporary independent scene, is very limited.

When one says that, "Kidlat Tahimik is the father of the Philippine independent cinema," there's also the question as to who has the authority to put this label on him. Mostly foreigners use this label. But here in Kidlat's native land, you will rarely hear this. So when we follow this designation—what are the actual criteria? There are filmmakers who get their ideas and concepts from Kidlat or follow the paths of his films. But a lot of filmmakers or the broader audience don't have an idea as to who he is. And I'm talking about the better informed people in Manila. Now, ask someone from the provinces about Kidlat. All the more you won't find anybody familiar with him.

Most of Kidlat's films are not quite narrative driven. They are more of an experimental type. Everything is just abstract. That's why most people find it boring. The majority of the audience is not used to appreciating cinema as another form of art.

### KIRI DALENA

Since my sisters Sari and Aba, and I grew up in the same circles of artists, I got to know Kidlat early on. I remember having seen Kidlat's works as a child. But my recollection of them is mostly in fragments. Only as an adult did I seriously watch his films again. The most vivid one I remember is *Turumba* (1981) because it was shot in Laguna where Kidlat's father is from. It is also where my father Danny's (Dalena) ancestral house is also there.

What inspired me about Kidlat was the story of how he got into film. He was an established economist in Europe, a student leader, the chairperson of the university student council. He forwent these career paths, left his comfort zone and decided to become an artist. This is already revolutionary. Later on,

what inspired me, or where I see parallels in our practices, is the kind of independence our films have, like they have a life of their own. Even before Lav Diaz, Kidlat came up with the idea that a film doesn't need to subscribe to a conventional time frame. Not just in terms of literal length but also the length of time you work on it. It was then that I thought, *Hey, this is something that I also want for my works*. I wanted this idea of films that have lives of their own, where the end is so uncertain and movable.

In 2005, Nick Deocampo organized a film festival in Mactan, and we, delegates from all over the Philippines, came up with the Mactan Manifesto where regional filmmakers like Kidlat, Peque Gallaga, Teng Mangansakan, and many others declared the need for and the support of the cultural richness of the Philippines, and the decentralization of filmmaking by cultivating centers of regional filmmaking outside Manila. With that alone, you can see that Kidlat puts effort in supporting regional cinema. Kidlat travels around, attending festivals, and screening his films. In the North, in Baguio and other places in the Cordilleras, he definitely has created a kind of filmmaking scene. He definitely influences young filmmakers.

Honestly, I'm surprised whenever I meet someone who hasn't heard of Kidlat or hasn't seen his films. I feel that it is something so organic that if you're a filmmaker, you should know your predecessors in the history of film. But then, there's my realization that it's not like that. Our appreciation of Philippine film will only be enriched or deepened if we have knowledge of what came before us. To have this continuous circulation of independent and experimental work is what we need.

Unfortunately, until now, the knowledge of this part of our culture is still exclusive and the audience is still limited. Kidlat already belongs to this roster of filmmakers who should be part of the teaching of the history of Philippine cinema. He belongs with filmmakers who have earned their right to be enshrined, like Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal. We need to have the same for those who are struggling in experimental and independent cinema spaces. And there I see Kidlat.

### SHERON DAYOC

The first film by Kidlat that I saw was *Bakit Dilaw ang Gitna ng Babag-hari?* (1994). It was around 2008 or 2009 at UP Diliman when I was making my first short films. It was sort of a journey for me because I was still a new filmmaker; I was still searching for my own voice. Since I'm also from the Zamboanga, watching *Babag-hari* taught me that going back to my roots and being honest with what I'm telling, and sharing my personal stories and my experiences can have a lot of impact on the audience. This became my foundation for the kind of stories I tell.

Back in the province, I had no idea what independent filmmaking was about. I only heard about Kidlat when I got to Manila and started my film studies. He was one of the first few filmmakers that popped out and that had a huge impact among young filmmakers like me. After watching his first film, *Perfumed Nightmare*, I got a different idea on how to tell sincere human stories, whether you're doing an arthouse, a documentary, or something else. At the end of the day, what becomes universal is if you're being honest about the stories you tell. And by being honest, you can also explore different forms of storytelling. Kidlat Tahimik developed his very own form of storytelling. You can see how sincere he is as a person and as a filmmaker. That part of his filmmaking influenced me very much with my own filmmaking.

Kidlat is an icon of independent filmmaking. After getting to know some of his works, I understood that one shouldn't be afraid of being authentic, and of having one's own voice. I realized that growing up in the province can be an advantage because you tend to have a more unique voice. Each culture and each region have their own environment and cultural backgrounds and, thus, developed their own unique voices. This can be a significant ingredient in the stories we tell. With this, we can contribute to the diversity of the Filipino experience.

### MES DE GUZMAN

When I was in high school in Nueva Vizcaya, I encountered Kidlat Tahimik's works in a book and in some clippings from a national newspaper in our library. I saw his film *Perfumed Nightmare* when I was in UP Diliman while I was taking a creative writing course at that time.

Maybe Kidlat's films had an influence on me in the aspect of being a regional filmmaker, or a filmmaker who represents the customs, traditions, and culture of our own province or milieu. We both hail from the Mountain Province. I can easily connect with his films, for the reason that Kidlat's films effectively capture the themes and the environment of a rural or semi-urban setting that are organic and dynamic to my own experiences as a local filmmaker.



Kidlat is one of the pioneers of the experimental and the independent film movement in the Philippines. He has the artistic and the undaunted connection to our native roots. His works are the voice of the marginalized and have the integrity and the uniqueness of a cinematic vision.

The importance and the inspiration of Kidlat Tahimik as a filmmaker lies in his being one of the models of pure independent and alternative filmmaking. His films are characterized by originality and artistry that express a filmmaker's personal insight on the human condition. Kidlat's works are known for being a philosophical critique of our neocolonial history. They articulate a critical point of view and a personal interpretation of Philippine society. His *sariling duende* is an unending search for a personal vision that resonates within the search of a nation's own cultural identity.



### EMMAN DELA CRUZ

The first time I probably saw a Kidlat Tahimik film was in the film program of UP's College of Mass Communication. I also saw most his films in a retrospective in Cine Adarna at UP. One of the most memorable is *Perfumed Nightmare*. It opened my mind to what cinema should be open to. Obviously, you see the progression of Kidlat as a filmmaker and how he, who is self-taught, created his own language. He took the responsibility that came with breaking out of the norm. I felt a kinship with him. He's very paternal to a lot of filmmakers. I myself had so many chances to visit him at his house in Baguio, and we had good interactions.

I call my three favorite Filipino films the "holy trinity" of cinema because, among the three of them, you can write the rest of Philippine cinema—that's my theory. The first is *Biyaya ng Lupa* (1959), the second is *Broken Marriage* (1983), and the third is *Perfumed Nightmare*. Kidlat's film is the closest to what you have to independence at that time and until today. It's a seminal work. When I first saw *Todo Todo Teros* (2006) by John Torres, I thought, "This is the direct descendant of Kidlat and his political works!"

Kidlat's biggest influence is showing you the meaning of being fully independent; putting forward the idea that you're not constricted by time, and not constricted by an output-driven mechanism. Instead, you can live within and without your work. Your work becomes an expression of your life as an artist, as a filmmaker, and as a mentor. That's the magic of his works. They become like a process of seeing how he grapples with all these issues and questions. This freedom to explore is also very Lav Diaz-like. I would say Kidlat's no-holds-barred style defined the next generation of independent filmmakers in the Philippines. More by accident—I don't think that he consciously did that—he opened up this way.

Watching Kidlat's films is like questioning yourself. He's like a Martian making a Filipino film. It's revolutionary in that way. Kidlat started the question of identity and form, and the acceptance of the paradoxes that the Filipino goes through. How do we make films? Why do we make films? Kidlat showed us a way to go through these issues of making a film in the Philippines. Of course, people would say, "Hey, he's rich. He has the resources." But it didn't stop him from making films that weren't safe. You just have to sit with him to see that he's still always in the middle of his work. He's always new. That's what I love about him.

Kidlat is like Santa Claus to a lot of the young filmmakers. They probably haven't seen neither him nor any of his works. They might have heard about his works but they see him more like a mascot. Kidlat has been very active in championing the works of young people. He goes to festivals and gives his Bamboo Camera Award, and his Sariling Duende Award. He wants the discourse to keep going. The younger filmmakers might not know it but, through their mentors, people who got influenced by Kidlat and the generation after him, like Raymond Red, Lav Diaz, and so on, there's a long thread of discourse and heritage. This long line of influence and exchange makes up the history of Philippine cinema. It's sad when the young filmmakers think they wouldn't be part of this tradition and discourse. Kidlat's influence is definitely there. It's when they are breaking the norm, when they suddenly find themselves in a no-man's land, that's when they meet Kidlat.

Alas, for the mass audience, Kidlat has no relevance. The Philippine mainstream is like Hollywoodism at its worst. It is filmmaking while in zombie mode in a film factory. That's what Kidlat has been resisting with his work, and that's what he has been saying from day one: question the maker! You're consuming something which does not nourish you. Even with the recent independent scene, it's so sad. You ask yourself: "What are those works?!" They are like replicas of something else. It's like mainstream in a weird way. Then again, here are great examples: Khavn de la Cruz, Raya Martin, and Jet Leyco. That's why I'm not losing hope for Philippine cinema. That's the inspiration we can get from Kidlat's work. I hope we don't stop looking at his work. That's what we need here. Period.



### KEITH DELIGERO

The only film by Kidlat Tahimik that I have seen is *Perfumed Nightmare* some time between 2005 and 2009. I love it. It's the kind of film I would like to make. When I discovered *Perfumed Nightmare*, I wanted to watch more of Kidlat's films. But it was impossible to find any of them.

I have not met anyone who have any idea about Kidlat or his works. That's why I keep recommending *Perfumed Nightmare*. I feel that they should watch it. It will change the way they think about cinema, the way they see themselves and the world.

I don't think that Kidlat and his filmmaking had an influence on me. I saw *Perfumed Nightmare* when I was already making films. I had already found my own way, my process, my method, and my film language. Instead, I found many similarities to the way I operate. It's more of an inspiration than an influence. I see similarities to my aesthetics in Kidlat's filmmaking. He favors this perspective in life on this very small scale, on ordinary things in small provincial towns. There are these youthfulness and childishness, which are also very obvious in my films. I also found a lot of small town pop culture references in his film. I like that.

I have a feeling that what happened to me in regard of Kidlat's work is similar to what happened to other filmmakers. They're not influenced directly. But they could have been inspired in terms how he worked. Kidlat makes films in his own way without giving in to any commercial aspirations or exterior influences. A lot of established independent filmmakers and even starting filmmakers are trying to do it that way. Even if they had not known Kidlat, and only discover him later on, they will be more inspired to go on doing films in their personal ways.

It's so important that every one of us making films outside of Manila be aware of our regions' specific sensibilities. You're telling stories about your own place, and how life is lived there. If young filmmakers would just see the possibilities of making small, personal films about what you see and what you experience in your own small place—that would be a great gain for Philippine cinema. It should be local. That's the way films should be made. That makes more sense than making all those films which are accessible through the mainstream. That's my advocacy. In that way, Kidlat Tahimik is very inspirational. I always go for local flavors. And that's Kidlat Tahimik: very local.



### NICK DEOCAMPO

I was a student in UP when I first heard of Kidlat; we're talking around 1979/1980. I saw *Perfumed Nightmare* and thought, "What is this?" I recognized that it was a totally different film—the film language and vocabulary. You must remember, in the '80s, we were going into the end of martial law. Everything was in the form of alternative: alternative media, alternative economy, and alternative lifestyle. And why not alternative cinema? Kidlat Tahimik provided us with this narrative type of filmmaking. But we owe to Kidlat the thought that the filmmaker can be self-reflexive. Because he filmed himself. He just burst the whole notion of what is filmic reality against reality-reality. With this, he destroyed several conventions. And I liked that. At a certain point, he was pioneering something.

Kidlat was always legendary. But he was absent. All the time, until now. Back from abroad—that's the first thing you hear about Kidlat. He succeeded abroad. And he appeals to the colonial mentality of those who are left behind here and who aspire to be recognized. Therefore, it plays to the whole colonial narrative that has been going on for a century in this country: make it abroad, come home, and then you are a hero. We play this until now. It has been feeding into our fantasies as independent filmmakers.

The phenomenal thing about Kidlat is that he fitted so well in a paradigmatic discourse of that era when Third World was the favorite word in the world. Kidlat Tahimik was extolled as one of the poster boys of the Third World aesthetics and politics. That's why he appealed so well with the academic community—until now! He's the darling of the academic community who is critical and resistant of the economic system that has ruled the world. But putting him in the independent movement during that time, I do not see his direct lineage.

Kidlat Tahimik is a pristine talent, with almost no beginnings in this country. It was almost like he came out of a bamboo that just opened up, and he was already self-contained as an independent individual filmmaker. Where did he come from? What is the context of his emergence, whoever he is? It's still a big phenomenological puzzle for us here in this country. Who in the lineage of the movie industry did he follow? None! This is Kidlat Tahimik! He was born inspired. Because of that, he had his internal personal transformation. It was a personal struggle. And he was able to break through. So, what is it that



we need to follow? It is his fierce independence that makes him a maverick spirit. In no uncertain terms, he was truly a maverick.

Historically, we need to put Kidlat Tahimik in his rightful place. I am all for Kidlat to be a National Artist—but for the right reason. If the reason is to call him the father of Philippine independent cinema, then I'm sorry, but somebody has to burst this balloon. It's not right. In the first place: what do we mean by “the father”? What did Kidlat father? And if he's the father of independent cinema, why can't he correct and put in order the chaos going on in independent cinema? Independent cinema has been so abused!

I am trying to make Kidlat accountable. He, who's been considered as a father, should step in and say exactly: “Children, this is how you should define it.” Like any good father, he should do that. If you are a paternalistic figure, please do something! There is no mediation from Kidlat, no statement at all, at this very crucial time when independent cinema is looking for a direction. When will the young digital filmmakers realize that they got the short end of their adulation? When do they see that there is no clear path to where this independent cinema is going? These people now believe that, “Oh, we are independent!” when actually they're going into the trap of commercial filmmaking. Is that inspired by Kidlat Tahimik? This is highly problematic.

Are we clear with independent cinema? Can we make him accountable now that he's dubbed the father of independent cinema? He's been put into a position wherein something has been made out of him and it appears as if he's been complicit in it—complicit in the sense that he's not correcting what blatantly appears to be wrong. Historically, when you talk about a father, and if I were his child, I'd be a rebellious child of his. Because I would like to think, “You orphaned me. Where were you at the time I needed you during the time of the Marcos regime? Why did you leave me here in this city, in these very difficult times of military oppression, while you were up there blessed in the heavens of the Cordilleras? Why were you not here in our messed-up life, when we were defining, and creating that space for independent cinema?” Did we have safety nets making our films? Did Kidlat Tahimik exactly tell us, “Oh, be careful with what's ahead.” Kidlat, the father? It's a myth. But should we blame the artist? Is it the responsibility of the artist to get himself known?



## LAV DIAZ

I don't remember the year anymore when this story happened. My youngest child was studying in Baguio, staying with my relatives there. Every weekend, I went up to Baguio, and every time, I texted or called Kidlat. He always took care of me. “Come to my place,” he'd say. “Come to my restaurant, let's eat,” or “Let's go somewhere, have coffee.” It became a ritual every weekend. One weekend, while we were hanging out, I recorded him doing some screenings, cursing and swearing. He was giving the dirty finger to a big construction that was about to become the SM Baguio. We were standing on top of his building. And Kidlat was shouting: “Look at that structure! It's poison to Baguio!” Kidlat was going on and on, complaining and complaining. Poetic justice?

Brillante Mendoza initiated this omnibus project with the three of us. He came up with the idea. The title is *Lakbayan* (2018). Some years ago, he asked me to join Sinag Maynila Film Festival as part of the jury. He said, “Lav, apart from this jury I'm asking you to be part of, I'm thinking of this project. What do you think of doing an omnibus with Kidlat?” I told him, “That's a good idea. Ask Kidlat.” I didn't bother to ask him why he chose the us. Why Kidlat, since, yeah, he's a bit off Dante's [Brillante] cinematic sensibilities, and at the same with me. Our respective cinematic styles differ a lot. But between Brillante and me, we both look up to Kidlat as our elder, as somebody who's like a father to us. Kidlat is part of that generation which started experimental cinema in the Philippines. He's part of our inspiration. It's a form of homage to Kidlat, and at the same time, a collaboration. It's some kind of a jam between the generations. I told Brillante, “It's okay, I'm in.” A few days later, Brillante texted me that Kidlat would be joining us.

You know, I can work fast and Dante can work fast. But we both know that with Kidlat, you might have to wait 'till forever—if you may. Kidlat might do it today or tomorrow. But if he asks, “Can you just wait for me?” You just wait for him until he says, “I'm ready this year.” Brillante wanted to submit the project to Berlinale 2018. Well, unfortunately, it was too late for Berlinale because of Kidlat. His part was two hours long, and he needed to shorten it a lot. But I'm very happy with it.



## LAWRENCE FAJARDO

I have seen only one film by Kidlat. It was around ten years ago when I was editing a video for an NCCA [National Commission for Culture and the Arts] event. Truthfully, I didn't watch the whole film. It was only a portion of *Perfumed Nightmare*. The concept of a guy from the province going to Paris was interesting. Also, the scene of the ritual of *tuli*. It looked like the work of a filmmaker-slash-ethnographer. It's good that there's a filmmaker recording the cultural practices and the customs of the people of the Cordillera or wherever that was. An important requirement for being a good filmmaker is the ability to adapt. You should adjust, observe the culture, the people, their events, and you film it. What I've seen and what I like with Kidlat's movies is his cultural versatility and his ability to immerse into different kinds of environment. So, that's Kidlat for me. But beside that clip of *Perfumed Nightmare*, I haven't seen any other film by him. Maybe because it's not my thing, what he's saying. I'm not that interested in what he wants to tell.

The major problem in the Philippines is access to the films that all these important filmmakers have done. Maybe Kidlat is better known abroad because, in foreign countries, there's a bigger interest in art films. Art is always the least priority of the people in the Philippines. But Kidlat knows how to push for his films to be screened in foreign countries. People here meet you with a kind of respect when your films have been shown abroad. Not because of your work and your art in themselves, but because of the recognition you get in foreign countries. You become a kind of celebrity. But as an artist, you're still immaterial. Your art doesn't matter. It's the problem of the audience, or even more of the government. But the arts don't matter to the government.

I don't think that Kidlat influenced me as a filmmaker. Growing up in Bacolod, my influence came from other sources. We watched the films of Peque Gallaga. That's the opposite side of the process of filmmaking represented by Kidlat. Kidlat might have directly influenced Auraeus Solito [a.k.a. Kanakan Balintagos]. There's also this strong ethnic dimension in his works. He's from Palawan and also digs deep into his assumed indigenous and tribal roots. Then there are Khavn de la Cruz and John Torres. I suppose they follow Kidlat's experimental way of filmmaking. It seems there are a lot of filmmakers who idolize Kidlat.

I cannot tell if Kidlat has any practical influence on younger filmmakers. When I teach at the Bacollywood Workshop in Negros, Kidlat and his works are not a big part of the curriculum. The history of filmmaking here in the country is very scattered, and that's the problem. We lack the historical background of our own national film culture. People might know Lino Brocka, Ishmael Bernal—but then what? Why? Because this kind of knowledge is not officially supported. It's not in the art curriculum. We don't have film libraries, and we don't have the books. Where are the books on our cinematic masters—on Celso Ad. Castillo, on Peque Gallaga? We need information. We don't know enough about our own culture. We live in a culture of ignorance, disrespect, and negligence.



## QUARK HENARES

I remember, we had an exercise in fourth year high school. We were supposed to make a short film. There was a book about Filipino short films and it mentioned filmmakers like Mike de Leon, and Raymond Red. But there was one strange name: Kidlat Tahimik. I wondered, “Whoa! Who's that person? I need to find this guy's movies!” I finally found one of his films at a Filipino film festival in SM Megamall. It was *Perfumed Nightmare*. I was totally stunned. It didn't follow the typical structure of mainstream cinema, or the three act structure of Regal, Viva, and Star Cinema movies. It's not like Mike de Leon or Brillante Mendoza where there is a story to follow, or even Lav Diaz for that matter. A lot of it was like random images put together. I thought the film was good. At that time, I had been growing as a film appreciator.

Rather than by Kidlat's aesthetics or anything else in the case of material filmmaking, I was influenced by his philosophy on life, how he sees the world, how he unleashed his inner *duende*, and how he found his own voice without adhering to colonialist preconceptions and mental structures. I admire how he was and still is able to do his own thing. The concept of digging for your own *duende* and always asking the people to do that is at the heart of who Kidlat is.

Kidlat is unique. He most likely is unknown to the vast majority of the Filipino movie audience. I do think, though, that filmmakers at least recognize him as the godfather of independent cinema in the Philippines. It's funny, the Philippine indie scene looks at him as both the godfather and as a kind of mascot because he's always wearing a *bahag*. He's always doing his rituals, dancing with his gong and

he brings his bamboo camera everywhere. People regard him in a different way than they would regard Brocka, Bernal, and de Leon. Kidlat was so influential in many ways for filmmakers like Khavn de la Cruz, Lav Diaz, and especially for experimental filmmakers like Roxlee or Raymond Red. They all look up to Kidlat. He's awesome, he's amazing. Really inspiring. What a guy!

In a weird way, the influence Kidlat has on so many filmmakers and the great reputation he has in the independent circle but at the same time the constant inaccessibility of his films make him a great candidate for the National Artist Award. Even to this day, Kidlat remains as elusive as he has always been. I suppose only a handful of people have seen his last film, *Balikbayan #1* in the Philippines. If independent films are inaccessible for most of the people in Manila, how much more difficult is it to get hold of niche experimental films like Kidlat's?

Without a doubt, Kidlat is influential. And he continues to create, which you can't say about a lot of the other authors of that time. It is also very important to note that Kidlat makes sure that he's part of the community and that he builds a community. There is a very social aspect to his filmmaking. He teaches the indigenous people to create their own cinema, and to preserve and promote their own culture. That should be rewarded as well, right?

### JEFFREY JETURIAN

I first heard of Kidlat Tahimik in 1977 when *Perfumed Nightmare* was screened at the Berlin International Film Festival. Back then, it was rare for a Filipino film to be invited to the big three international film festivals. So, Kidlat's film's inclusion in Berlin was a big deal, particularly among film buffs. Fortunately, the film had a special screening at the UP Film Center, where I was a freshman then—so that was my first exposure to a Kidlat Tahimik film.

Kidlat and I never got introduced to each other, and neither did we have any form of interaction whatsoever. His work influenced me only to the extent that it exposed me to a different kind of storytelling. One that is poles apart from the Hollywood formula films that we've grown up with and gotten accustomed to. Kidlat's *Perfumed Nightmare* was among my first exposure to avant-garde cinema.

Kidlat can be regarded as the founder and father of indie and alternative cinema in the Philippines. He pioneered and espoused independent filmmaking at a time when our cinema culture was steeped in Hollywood and mainstream sensibilities, and he stuck to it throughout his entire career. That's true artistic integrity and commitment.

For the longest time, since the start of his film career, Kidlat Tahimik stood as the single icon and lone voice of regional independent filmmaking. But, sadly, he had been largely ignored by the Manila-centric industry. It was only in recent times, with the creation of numerous local film festivals and outreach programs such as Cinema Rehiyon by the NCCA that filmmakers from the Visayas, Mindanao, and provinces in Luzon, that regional filmmakers were given a platform to narrate their indigenous stories on film. Kidlat Tahimik himself was belatedly acknowledged and honored for his contribution to indie filmmaking. It was only recently that he was bestowed with a lifetime achievement award by Cinemalaya in 2013. However, the new generation of filmmakers probably is not aware who Kidlat Tahimik is.

Kidlat walks the talk when it comes to promoting his indigenous roots. Nothing can illustrate this more and with so much impact than when he attends congressional hearings or awards nights wearing only a loin cloth worn by the indigenous natives of the region he came from.

### JUN LANA

The first film by Kidlat Tahimik I saw was *Perfumed Nightmare*. I was in college then. Shortly after, around 1994/1995, I met him in Baguio. It was during the University of the Philippines' National Writing Workshop. A couple of writers, including me, went to his house and had dinner with him. And so, to have that meeting with Kidlat Tahimik, just his presence gave me so much inspiration. That was an unforgettable experience for me. He's an institution. All filmmakers look up to him, especially those who are interested in a different kind of storytelling.

Even when I was still a student, when I was avidly looking around for films beyond the mainstream, it was difficult to see a film by Kidlat. You needed to go to special screenings to watch his films. The situation didn't improve. We have so many local film festivals for independent films, we have retrospectives, and ABS-CBN has done restorations of films. But you wonder, where's Kidlat in all of that? He's so important! Then again, I don't think he's the type of filmmaker who's concerned about

being relevant and praised. He just makes his films. But the FDCP [Film Development Council of the Philippines] and the NCCA should make a conscious effort to make sure that the young filmmakers are exposed to the films of the likes of Kidlat Tahimik.

I grew up watching a lot of films from Viva Pictures. It wasn't until I was in college that I started going to the UP Film Center to watch short films by alternative filmmakers by going to CCP [Cultural Center of the Philippines] for special screenings. It was like hearing rumors that there's going to be this or that screening—no internet back then! To watch his films was a real adventure. To be honest, I didn't understand his kind of filmmaking at first. When ten people watch a film by Kidlat Tahimik, you get ten different versions of what the film is about. His kind of storytelling is, let's say, atmospheric, totally different from the kind of films I was used to. It took me awhile to appreciate because I was so exposed to the traditional and conventional kind of storytelling, and plot-oriented films. It was a violent shift. Kidlat and his films opened my mind to other perspectives of storytelling.

Therefore, Kidlat Tahimik and his films are still so very important to the film scene. He inspired many young filmmakers to take a different route, to experiment, and to use the tools of storytelling in a different way. He absolutely still has an influence on young film directors entering the scene in this decade. He's a master filmmaker. When you watch his films, you see that they are timeless. Any young filmmaker who's exposed to the filmmaking of Kidlat will definitely be inspired. I wish I could be like him.

When he makes his films, he makes them on his own terms. He's just the purest version of a filmmaker. He doesn't compromise. That's why I would definitely subscribe to the idea that Kidlat is the godfather of independent and alternative filmmaking in the Philippines. His works opened a gateway to alternative cinema, to independent filmmaking. That was what Kidlat Tahimik did for Philippine cinema. Filmmakers should be continuously exposed to the works of Kidlat Tahimik.

### ED LEJANO

I was in senior high school when I saw a film by Kidlat Tahimik for the first time. Kidlat had just won an award for *Perfumed Nightmare* at Berlinale. When I first saw *Perfumed Nightmare*, it opened a portal in me because I realized there's another form of making movies. I thought, "Okay, he's an artist. He has a different way of making movies outside of the studio system." At that time, we didn't talk about independent films yet, because the concept of indie was not yet clear. It was a new way of making movies, which at that point, I've only seen in short films. It was like a mosaic, what Kidlat used as a style. I thought, "Oh, this is what Third World cinema is!" He positioned himself as a postcolonial, Third World filmmaker with a distinct authorial voice.

He used unique Pinoy humor and a unique perspective on history and colonialism. It gave me a little pride. Because at that time, we were a poor country under a dictatorship. I thought, "So, there's validity in our existence, we have a voice that we can share. Perhaps other countries can relate to us."

*Perfumed Nightmare* opened this new view on our own culture, that maybe this will go somewhere using our Third World voice, and somehow, we can be recognized. I was trying to figure out why we were always depicted in exotic ways. Internationally, Philippine cinema was identified as neorealist—that we're making a virtue out of our poverty. Then came Kidlat with his different approach. He would use our colonial experiences as a platform for his amusements about our history, and the Filipino identity.

Most definitely, Kidlat had. During the late '70s, he set himself apart from other award-winning Filipino directors. They were working with and within the industry. But Kidlat was his own producer; he was his own cinema. And he deliberately stayed that way, was conscious about him being an outsider, and an unconventional experimental filmmaker. He was conscious that he was not for movie theaters but more for galleries or auditoriums, and other noncommercial environments.

Early on, he was already associated with big names like Herzog and Coppola. And so Kidlat did not go into the direction of Brocka or the other big Filipino directors at that time. Therefore, when the digital age came to be in the late '90s and early 2000s, it was easy for filmmakers using the digital technology to look up to Kidlat. I see a strong connection when digital Filipino features first came to be disseminated in film festivals. I see some influence on technical aspects, like other than the normal ways of funding. That's why I regard him as one of the key influences of the film scene.

Maybe Kidlat had an influence on film and art students, and visual and performance artists. They are quite familiar with his works. Maybe people in literature are familiar with his





work as well. Kidlat has a name for what his work represents, for the buzz words like subaltern, transnational, postcolonial, imagined community. But does he have an influence as far as popular movies and entertainment? I doubt that. Kidlat's influence is on those familiar with the art circles or the film circles.

Maybe nowadays, Kidlat's name has spread a bit among the common audience, and they maybe have some knowledge about him as a person. But they are most likely not familiar with his works, which are only for the high-brow film buffs. He's not a household name.

Kidlat definitely is regional. Because he uses that as part of his persona and filmic vocabulary. Whether he is a true spokesperson of regional cinema from the Cordilleras or not, I'm not so sure. What I see more in him is the Western-educated member of the Baguio arts community. He uses that Western education to put more layers to his persona as a filmmaker. With this, he becomes more than just regional, even more than a Filipino filmmaker. But that's the Philippines. Our identity is pierced with Spanish, American, Japanese, and god knows what influences. In a way, Kidlat is a representative of that element of the Philippines which has been open to artistic influences from outside.



### ERIK MATTI

I first saw a film by Kidlat Tahimik when I was 18 years old, around 1989/1990, in my second year of college in Bacolod as a Mass Communication student. There was a group of guys from Mowelfund who was doing provincial immersions, talking about filmmaking and showing their short films. Part of the screenings was *Perfumed Nightmare*. The whole experience of watching films by Joey Agbayani, Raymond and Jon Red, animation from Roxlee was a weird moment. Of course, our only link to filmmaking was to narrative stuff. If you're from the countryside, the things that you get to see are quite limited.

I remember asking the Manila guys, "So what's the foundation of all these works?" The movie was a disjointed, experimental stuff, and just a series of images. I tried making sense of *Perfumed Nightmare*. It's an exploration of stuff, just going here and there with the camera. If you're from Manila, you're familiar with experimental stuff, you know the differences between the cinematic categories, right? But the Manila guys weren't helpful at all. They said, "Well, whatever you get from it, that's good. Whatever you think of it is valid." But I got nothing from it. What I was expecting was an explanation of where this or that was coming from.

What I took from this experience is the feeling that goes with it. Like, when a particular shot is framed in a particular way. Kidlat had all this very raw, strange angles. It just opens your mind to new things: what the camera can do, what lighting conditions can do, that you don't necessarily need to go for the Hollywood type of angles, and that there are other ways to see things. The wide angles, the fisheye lenses. You only see them with this kind of experimental work because they're too extreme. You ask yourself, "Wow, what does that lens do?" You start thinking about being a bit irreverent in the filmmaking approach. That's what it mainly told me.

Kidlat, nowadays, doesn't have much of an influence anymore. The major influence of Kidlat was in the generation of Raymond Red, Mac Alejandre, and Yam Laranas in the 1980s 'till the 1990s. Those were the guys who were immersed in Kidlat's works. They showed them what an underground filmmaker could possibly achieve, even without any money in the pocket. You just grab a camera and a few feet of negatives, and then you go out and shoot. But today, Kidlat's influence is no longer there.

Even more so with the ordinary audience. I doubt that Kidlat's films had or have any measurable impact on them. Knowledge about Kidlat's films doesn't go around. Not when I was in college and most particularly not now. It was only when I moved to Manila in 1991/'92 that I got to go and watch independent and experimental films at CCP and Mowelfund. But prior to that, none of us had any idea what directors like Kidlat were doing. Coming from the province, when you see a provincial setting, you're not that interested in the first place. When you see all this daily life stuff and it's something that you always see around you in the countryside day in and day out, then I think, "Do I have the patience for this?" As a normal audience, you never care about those films. With something as guerilla as Kidlat's films, where it just depicts reality in its barest sense, what the camera can capture at the very moment, and even if it's quirky and has a bit of humor, a bit tongue-in-cheek, you just don't have the patience for it.



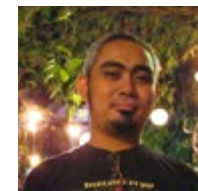
### JET LEYCO

In college, I discovered alternative cinema when I was an intern for Khavn de la Cruz and Lav Diaz. I was studying Communication Arts. Once, Roxlee and Kidlat Tahimik showed up. There was also a talk at Ateneo de Manila University where Kidlat showed up, and he talked about his filmmaking. At that time, he was filming *Balikbayan #1*. I also saw parts of his documentary *Bakit Dilaw ang Gitna ng Babag-bari?* It's hard to access Kidlat's films unless you go to Baguio and personally borrow his films.

I'm impressed by Kidlat's energy, and the specific way he creates films. It's overwhelming. He can do any film he wants, even without financial assistance. He can do a period film like *Balikbayan* about the explorations of Magellan. I always hear other directors say they would need a lot of time and resources to do this or that film. But Kidlat just does it. He does his films because of his energy. And his efforts pay off. This kind of cinema reflects alternative filmmaking: you do what you got to do, even when there's no budget; you only have the camera and your ideas. And that's it! This work attitude influenced me a lot.

Sometimes, a filmmaker thinks he needs to have a grant. But if you have ideas of how to get around your budget constraints or think ahead and cope with your problems in creative ways, you can do it. Khavn can do it. I can do it. That's how Kidlat does it, too. And that's why it's justified to call Kidlat the father of Pinoy independent cinema. For example, you can see it with the works of Khavn, and the earlier works of Raya Martin. They are students of Kidlat. You can see it in the first two films of John Torres as well. It's about the process of making a film without a lot of external forces like a studio or people interested only in money-making. Nowadays, people rely too much on technology. They think that if they cannot work with proper high-tech equipment, they will be compromising their work. Instead, one should maximize all the possible processes of filmmaking. You as a filmmaker, a director, a writer, and a cinematographer need to maximize all elements to achieve whatever your vision is.

I wish a lot more independent filmmakers could see Kidlat's films, or, at least, read or talk about him. When I ask my students about him, they tell me they haven't heard of Kidlat, nor have they seen his films. The impact of Kidlat on the contemporary generation is like zero. That's why I also don't think that Kidlat has an influence on young filmmakers from the regions. They don't have access to academic facilities and they cannot access Kidlat's films. There's no knowledge about him in the provinces. Maybe when those guys come to the big cities like Cebu or Davao they will have an idea. Hopefully, they learn the process of this kind of filmmaking, wherein one gets results even without the academic background and all the modern technology. I wish that a lot more people get to know Kidlat's works and the experimental scene.



### GUTIERREZ "TENG" MANGANSAKAN II

I first encountered a film by Kidlat Tahimik in 1995 during the celebration of the centennial of cinema. I was a student at that time. I went to Manila from Davao to study. That was the start of my love affair with Kidlat's films. I tried to invite him to Davao that year to screen his films. But because of some circumstances, we were not able to push through with this. In the following year, when I was studying film at the Mowelfund, I saw more of his films, and I was able to meet him personally. From then on, we established a personal relationship.

I love the rawness and playfulness of Kidlat's films. The one thing that got me interested was his questioning of his identity and the process of looking for the Philippine identity. During that time, the question of identity was also very important for me. I became politicized then. So, I was not only starting to find my Philippine identity but also struggling for my Moro identity. *Perfumed Nightmare* gave me the idea that sometimes you don't have to search far for things as profound as identity. Maybe you just have to look within yourself, within your family and your neighborhood, and you will find a lot of things there. As a filmmaker and as a writer, that was very important. It helped me to look for things in my films, things that are close to my heart, things that are bothering me and inspiring me at the same time. Among all other Filipino filmmakers, it was Kidlat Tahimik who influenced me to go into that direction.

Kidlat came at a very important moment for Philippine cinema in the 1970s when he did *Perfumed Nightmare* and it was recognized in Berlin. It was a time of great reckoning of the sociopolitical value of cinema and cinema as part of a bigger sociopolitical and economic structure. Kidlat was there to show us that we can make films the way he did. After him came Nick Deocampo. The way he made films also showed me that I could explore the other faces of my identity. I credit Kidlat as the ideological godfather of the Philippine independent cinema. Until now, his films are very relevant, especially his questioning of colonialism and the very notion of identity. He stayed relevant over the years and up to this very moment, especially against the backdrop of the superficial notion of Filipino identity. Kidlat wants us

to go deeper into our psyche, even into our painful past, and into things that are not so kind and good. In order to know ourselves, we need to have the courage to go into that direction.

Kidlat once said one very good thing to me, “It’s not enough that you listen to your *duende*, you must trust that *duende* to lead you to the right direction.” This has been my guiding light. That’s how I try to make films and to write. I listen to myself and listen to my inner voice, and let that voice dictate my cinema and my writings. Maybe by trusting and listening, it’s going to bring me to the right direction. If I can do that, I would be able to answer my question of who I am as a person, as a Filipino, and as a Moro. Because being Moro and Filipino is you trusting your inner self, and this will make good things for you.

## ARNEL MARDOQUIO

Honestly, I have not seen any of Kidlat Tahimik’s films. That I have not watched any of his films is very unfortunate on my part. In my opinion, Kidlat as a filmmaker has no impact in the regions, especially not in Mindanao. Teng Mangansakan is the first in our generation of filmmakers in Mindanao to have been influenced by him. On the other hand, it is interesting to know how Kidlat’s regional sensibility connects to the national geography of ideas and the contemporary struggles independent filmmakers in the Philippines are facing until now. We not only create films, we also help create the alternative industry.

Kidlat Tahimik might be a product of a blown-up media hype as he was framed by European media as a Filipino icon. Based on the reviews of his films, I would surmise that he made art films that are accentuated by European aesthetics to deconstruct Filipino sensibilities in a way that pleases European audiences. That Kidlat’s name gained enough popularity to last until now can be interpreted as his films are superior in some sense.

I’ve met Kidlat many times in social gatherings, and my impression is that he has a warm personality. He always talks in English; it’s his mother tongue. Maybe he speaks globally and he thinks locally. His *maliit na duende*, therefore, is kind of a good philosophy to listen to and to promote—especially to the young generations—for it encourages regional voices to find their own niche.

However, the non-availability of his films in our country is a constant problem in making up one’s mind about Kidlat as an artist. His films remain obscured; as a filmmaker, he did not make any effort to make his films available even in selected circuits. Now that he is managing a cinematheque in Baguio, there should be no more excuse for not programming his films in all the other regional cinematheques managed by the FDCP, so that many more people could get introduced to his films. The government should support indie filmmakers like Kidlat Tahimik.

## BRILLANTE MENDOZA

My first personal encounter with Kidlat Tahimik was when he watched one of my films. I cannot tell anymore which precisely that was. Maybe it was *Manoro* (2006) because I remember that Kidlat liked that film so much. My first encounter with one of his films was only recently. I was not exposed to Kidlat’s cinema and it had no influence on my own development as a filmmaker. There was no influence at all on my aesthetics or my cinematic sensibilities. Of course, I heard of him before, when I went to Mowelfund. That must have been around 1999.

Kidlat definitely has had an influence as a filmmaker and was an inspiration to a lot of experimental and independent filmmakers after him. I agree that he should be recognized as the father of independent cinema in the Philippines. He was the first to work this way. I watched *Perfumed Nightmare* recently. Having made that kind of film during that time is amazing. It’s a classic. For this alone, Kidlat has earned appreciation.

Unfortunately, the younger generation and the young filmmakers now don’t look up to Kidlat that much. Because the young filmmakers are into form and technology. They’re not into content and storytelling. They do films to be recognized and known. That’s their route. Most of the young filmmakers now have the wrong attitude toward their craft. Everything comes so easy for them, because of the technology. That’s why their recognition for the people who are supposed to give them inspiration, for instance Kidlat, is just not there. Kidlat doesn’t get the attention he deserves. Ask any young filmmaker if they have seen any of Kidlat’s films. They haven’t.



There are so many young directors who don’t know who he is. In the earlier times, during the ’80s, to the ’90s, Kidlat had this role of raising the awareness for alternative forms of filmmaking. During his time, in the ’70s and the ’80s, he stood out for doing independent, underground films. But I don’t think that this position still applies nowadays. I don’t think that he has any influence at all within this generation of recent filmmakers.

Kidlat is definitely a regional filmmaker. I would say that it matters and is important to be regarded as a regional filmmaker. There should be a distinction between a regional filmmaker and a Filipino filmmaker. Of course, when you’re a regional filmmaker you are a Filipino filmmaker. But it is different when you make specific films for specific regions, for instance for Mindanao, for the Visayas, and for the Cordilleras. That’s what defines your cinema: the reflection of your very specific point of view which comes from the center of your culture. This will be of great help for the society of which you’re a part of. Your work will help define the society, to make it aware of itself, and to let it grow. Just in this regard, Kidlat’s work is of great importance.

## PAM MIRAS

I first saw a film by Kidlat back at college in UP. It was *Perfumed Nightmare*. I liked the visuals and the storytelling and how it was experimental. But it didn’t speak to me in an emotional way, like the films of narrative directors like Mike de Leon or Ishmael Bernal. But it’s the canon when you talk about Philippine experimental films that Kidlat Tahimik is there.

I can’t say so much about Kidlat’s direct influence on the works of other filmmakers. The closest to him I can see in the scene now is Khavn de la Cruz. Though even other experimental filmmakers like Gym Lumbera or John Torres are not so much on Kidlat’s colorful, mystical, visceral, historical level. But Kidlat is very supportive of filmmakers in general. I remember there was a time when I was in Baguio with a friend. We were talking about our films. I was doing a short film, which I couldn’t finish, because I didn’t like how it was going, and there wasn’t enough money to finish it. Kidlat’s advice: “That’s all right. Take a break. And then come back to it.” I know a lot of filmmakers, whenever they’re in Baguio, they drop by his house, and he’s willing to listen to whomever and offer support for their filmmaking.

Kidlat is not as active as Teng Mangansakan’s group in Mindanao or the Visayan group in bringing together films and filmmakers from Baguio, from Ifugao and the Mountain Province. In that sense, he’s not active in supporting a specific regional scene or regional filmmaking as a whole. He just makes his films. But he supports filmmakers, visual artists, all sorts of artists in different ways. It’s not about bringing them around. He’s creating awareness about ways of doing things. His whole body of work reflects that. When I was growing up I was fascinated, because he was the first filmmaker in the scene of this kind of experimental filmmaking who had a name. He’s some kind of rock star. Even if he doesn’t have this machinery—just living the way he does is already a big influence by itself. Look at him and how he lives, and you automatically get the regional awareness of what’s going on in the North. However, that’s not something that he plans.

But speaking in general, Kidlat’s influence and knowledge about his works are very limited. Maybe the young crowd which usually attends Cinemalaya, they’re aware of Kidlat, but most possibly have never have seen one of his films. They have no idea of how experimental he is. They see some weird editing—and that’s experimental for them. Kidlat is more extreme.

## RAYMOND RED

I remember hearing the name Kidlat Tahimik as early as my high school years. I was in the Philippine High School for the Arts, where I was studying visual arts. I heard about Kidlat’s name in connection with experimental cinema and independent filmmaking. But I wasn’t into filmmaking then. I never imagined being a filmmaker. Only some years later, around 1982, when I was at the University of the Philippines’ Film Center, where I joined the Cinema as Art workshop headed and run by Nick Deocampo, did I want to become a filmmaker. It was there, in the experimental film workshop, where we had the opportunity to watch *Perfumed Nightmare*. They also let us watch *Sinong Lumikha ng Yoyo? Sinong Lumikha ng Moon Buggy?* (1982).

I still very vividly remember seeing those films. The experience struck me because I never imagined making films in that approach. I’ve never seen any film like that before. And so, that was an eye-opener. We learned about what Kidlat had already achieved in the late ’70s: having *Perfumed Nightmare* screened in international festivals, and getting it picked up by Coppola’s Zoetrope Studio. It was





something we all aspired as young filmmakers. Recognizing somebody like Kidlat Tahimik was amazing. He was like an enigmatic figure. He was like a phantom, also because of his very mysterious name.

Eventually, I did get to meet him. It was very exciting to meet this great source of my early inspiration. I belonged to that Super-8 generation of the early '80s, which kind of jumpstarted a movement. That's how we described ourselves. We called it a movement because it was a conscious, concerted effort. We all believed in trying to create a new cinema outside the mainstream. It was pure intention that drove us. At the same time, we had our inspirations. We were studying the powerful film directors of that time, like Mike de Leon, Lino Brocka, and Ishmael Bernal. But Kidlat stood out; he was like the epitome, or the perfect embodiment, of what an independent filmmaker is.

When I got to know him and we became friends, he invited us to his house in Baguio. There was a time when a lot of the young Mowelfund filmmakers were invited to Baguio to do screenings, and Kidlat would open his doors to us. We would hang out in his house and stay overnight there. We all developed a good relationship with him. About then was when I realized he was totally independent. He had all this equipment at home: he had his sound recording equipment, and a flatbed Steenbeck for editing 16mm film. He was self-sufficient, all the way to sound, except for the film lab. He would go down to Manila to process his films. It was so inspiring for us to know that there was a filmmaker like him. But at the same time, he's not selfish. He was holding workshops; he organized this group called the Sunflower Film Cooperative in Baguio. They started their own movement over there.

Imagine, an 18-year-old kid starting out in filmmaking, and here I met one of my inspirations, a legend—Kidlat was already a legend, as early as then. You befriended him, and he invited you to his house—that was quite amazing.

I do know Kidlat is a purist. He has created his cinema. And if he finds his audience, then he's fulfilled with that. But if he only finds a niche audience he's also happy with it. He remains one of the true independent and alternative filmmakers. And yet he's been named a National Artist. That's an amazing achievement. Being considered is already a big honor and boost for independent cinema! Cooler than any of the filmmakers of this generation. In the past two decades, there has been no one like him. He's a living example of his own art. He's definitely the first of his kind, but he's probably also the last of his kind. Kidlat deserves a retrospective, and a reintroduction to a kind of festival crowd: cinephiles. People need to know about him and his work.



### SHERAD ANTHONY SANCHEZ

I haven't seen any of Kidlat's films when I decided to become a filmmaker. When I started, Kidlat was not in my consciousness. When I decided to make films, I immersed myself in European cinema classics and world cinema, but what informed me was Hollywood. I don't think I have made a film that reflects a palpable influence of Kidlat.

It's not that I don't like Kidlat's films. Not because the films are bad, but because I see them as coming from a macho logic. They follow what I call a *kanto* boy logic, and *kanto* boy aesthetics, like when you have these *titos* drinking outside their houses, hanging out, and late at night you hear them philosophize. How they talk, how they formulate their logic, I see that very much in Kidlat's works.

His films remind me very much of my *tito* talking to me about politics, film, and globalization. Even the order of logic and the humor—because most of the time they're drinking—they come off to me as macho. That doesn't sit well with me. It's not that Kidlat's films didn't make an impact on me or didn't affect me. Of course I had fun.. I was conscious enough to realize, "No, I'm not a filmmaker like that." I appreciate that this culture of *kanto titos* drinking and philosophizing has made its way into cinema. It certainly has that Filipino warmth. But then again, that's the kind of culture I'm keeping myself away from.

I can't say if there's a direct influence of Kidlat on the film scene or on particular directors. But in terms of semblance of aesthetics? Yes, I see that with John Torres, Khavn, and also parts of the Mowelfund group like the old Mowelfund short films from the '80s by Raymond Red, Roxlee, Cesar Hernandez. I mean, Raymond's *Ang Magpakailanman* (1982) is more Dziga Vertov than Kidlat Tahimik. But there's a familiar vernacular experimentation expressed in those works. Nowadays? Younger experimental directors like Gym Lumera, Malay Javier, and Timmy Harn—did they get something from Kidlat? Is it the mode of production? I consider Kidlat like a film essayist. But we don't have a tradition following him, there's no line of successors.

I don't think that Kidlat has any influence on the broader audience. I've been teaching students in various places, and Kidlat is rarely mentioned. But Kidlat surely is part of the text. When you talk about

Philippine cinema, specifically independent cinema, Kidlat is always the topic. The problem is that thinking is exclusive to Manila. Because the understanding of independent filmmaking in various regions is different, it's quite basic. They have a hard time understanding current independent cinema; they will have a harder time trying to track its history.

I don't know if Kidlat plays a specific role in the context of regional cinema. I can't say much about the contemporary scene in Mindanao. I'm not familiar with this generation of filmmakers. But in my generation, there was definitely no influence. For example, in Cebu, I don't think they got it from Kidlat because when they started making their short films, most of them were naïve filmmakers.

There's this kind of naivety where they introduce a kind of vernacular, local culture, and humor. Keith Deligero would probably best represent this kind of Cebuano filmmaking. He believes in the same kind of principles you find with Kidlat: this certain kind of humor, of politicization. His films also work more like essays than narrative films. Keith is another representation of this *tito kanto* culture that is present everywhere in the Philippines. That's the only line with which I can connect Keith with Kidlat. But that's also how our government is run: by *titos* who, after a drinking session, decide that they have a say in politics.



### RICHARD SOMES

I became a filmmaker over 12 years ago. But it was only seven or eight years ago that I saw a film by Kidlat Tahimik. It was a tribute to him, in connection with a filmmaking class. I was invited, and they showed *Perfumed Nightmare*. It's a great film because I was able to see how and from where Kidlat started. It is not so much his techniques in filmmaking which influenced me, but his ingenuity and originality. The insight on how Kidlat Tahimik's mind works left a great impression on me. He found his own voice. I envy him for that.

Kidlat's influence is mostly in his attitude to filmmaking, how he's being true to his culture and his storytelling. Other filmmakers are mostly influenced by Kidlat's passion and free spirit. They want to do their films in the same way. They want to go on their journey as an artist with a free spirit and want to produce a body of work with a free spirit. That's the essence of his craft and artistry. Kidlat threw away all those things which deeply influenced us: Hollywood, the commerce behind it, and the expectations of an audience whose overwhelming majority is only fed and conditioned by the formulas of the industry. All this doesn't mean anything to Kidlat. He just follows his heart, and what he thinks is pure art.

This kind of cultural sensibility has had a lot of positive effects for aspiring filmmakers, then and now. Listening to this voice of Kidlat reminds us to be purer, to be honest, to stick with this idea that there are a million different stories to be told and that there are a million different ways those stories can be told. Beside genre filmmaking in the mainstream, there is a genuine, personal, and cultural way of filmmaking. Kidlat set the example for this.

His example for regional filmmaking is to go back and look at your own culture, to feel, to sense your environment, to hold it, and to immerse in it. You realize that there's a lot of original ideas which you might find only in your very own culture and nowhere else, based on the influence of your regional environment. And you realize, our cultures have the same Filipino voice. They just have different perspectives and faces and practices. There's the magic, and the mysticism. Kidlat paved the way for the recognition of the diversity of our local cultures. He is one of those filmmakers who pushed that and showed us the way.

Kidlat truly raised the bar for what we call alternative or indie filmmaking. At the same time, he challenged it. And he pushed you as a filmmaker. You cannot stay content. You have to keep your own work authentic. You have to go back to the specifics. You need to go back to what is the most common to you and the most familiar to the people of your region and to us as Filipinos. We tend to forget that because we are more influenced by Western sensibilities. That's what Kidlat Tahimik tells us. You cannot deny that Kidlat paved the way. He pushed the boundaries.



### JOHN TORRES

*Perfumed Nightmare*, the first film by Kidlat Tahimik that I saw, remains memorable for me. I was in school in Ateneo. Kidlat had a screening and a lecture there. I had a sense that the filmmaker was someone I very much could enjoy communicating with. I was so happy. I felt a strong affinity toward *Perfumed Nightmare*. It freed my mind. It seemed like the film had so much freedom. It had an element of play that liberated me and the process of my own filmmaking. I thought you always needed to make a film in a traditional sense, from a script, with a plan. Watching *Perfumed Nightmare* just reminded me that you can



indeed be unsure about all those things, you can just go there and film, and make a raw but very heart-filled film.

Kidlat had very much an influence on me as a person and as an artist. His use of sound and dialogue, and the way he stages his scenes struck me, like filming is not such a precious thing to do in the way that you need to have a big crew. You didn't need to make the act of filming an event that caused you a lot of worries. It made me love and explore the process of filmmaking.

With even just contemporary filmmakers like Raya Martin or Khavn de la Cruz, who have admitted to having Kidlat as an influence on their works, with even just this influence on two important filmmakers from this generation, who are working in the alternative, experimental filmmaking scene, it already shows that Kidlat has had a significant impact, that his contribution to filmmaking in the Philippines is strong and still vivid. We can chase so many traces of influence back to Kidlat. He opened the road for us, made it possible for us to make films in our own ways and to not be ashamed of our own points of view.

His concept of the *sariling duende* is very important. It influenced us a lot in a way that we would never resort to making films the way others do—for better or for worse. Even though it isn't guaranteed that we will make good films, at least the exploration of the process, the freedom, and the playfulness that Kidlat has always reminded us to pursue every time we do the act of filmmaking, are enough encouragement for us. This encouragement is a huge contribution to the Philippine film scene as a whole.



### PAOLO VILLALUNA

The first time I saw a film by Kidlat Tahimik was in 2000. It was a celebration of world cinema on national TV on channel 2. They programmed independent films and showed Kidlat's *Perfumed Nightmare* and *Bakit Dilaw ang Gitna ng Bahag-hari?* They looked like documentaries but still felt like kind of a narrative. They were shown with Nick Deocampo's *Oliver* (1983). Can you imagine the impression those works made on a young man like me? That was when I decided to become a filmmaker. My next move was to become a member of batch 2000 at Mowelfund and to immerse myself in the workshop on filmmaking.

A few years later, I had the opportunity to work with Kidlat. The Japanese filmmaker Kiji Imaizumi was shooting [*Abong: Small Home* (2003)] in Manila and mostly in Baguio. Kidlat was one of his producers. I had to replace the production manager so I was able to work with Kidlat in Baguio. Before I met him, I thought he would be a strange guy. But to my surprise, I found him to be very easy to work with, and a nice guy. Although, I was also surprised to learn that he was pretty rich. Based on Kidlat's cinema, I thought he would be a guy who's poor and wanted to express himself and just used what small resources he had. Obviously, it was a philosophical and conscious decision to work the way he did. Given the money he must have had, he could have made the usual narrative films. But he had other things in mind and chose differently. That's when I discovered that you can have your own unique voice in cinema. And Kidlat had a very particular one.

Because Kidlat is so influential in filmmaking, people had to put a title on him. Thus, naming him the godfather of independent cinema. I would rather call him the grandfather of independent filmmaking in the Philippines, since I see Nick Deocampo as the father. Kidlat was influential to young filmmakers of my generation, 2000 onwards. But I don't see that influence with the millennials. His influence is based on handed-down reputation because the millennials haven't seen his films. It's nearly impossible to see them. Plus, the recent film community is so scattered. I don't see a common ground, a kind of movement, like what we of the year 2000 generation has. Is Kidlat ripe for a rediscovery? Most definitely! I hope it's just a matter of time 'till Kidlat's films will be seen again.

I wouldn't go as far to say that the Filipino independent scene can't be what it is without Kidlat. However, I would strongly stress that regional cinema would not exist in the way it now does without Kidlat. Prior to him, regional cinema had been mainstream, following the mainstream narrative agenda. But then, because Kidlat talked about his region, particularly Ifugao, and adopted the image of the young brown Filipino, people became aware of the value of their very own regional culture.

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