

Technology and National Identity in Kidlat Tahimik's "Perfumed Nightmare"

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IN POSTCOLONIAL THEORETICAL studies of cultural hybridity, technology and its promise as a cultural site for the negotiation of national identity has been under-researched. This neglect is particularly evident in explorations of the role technology plays in renegotiating the representation of the postcolonial subject within the cinematic tradition of Third Cinema. This article analyses Filipino filmmaker Kidlat Tahimik's 1977 film *Mababangong Bangungot* (*Perfumed Nightmare*) and its cultural context in order to suggest technology is more than just a commodity or signifier of difference between the First and Third Worlds; rather the presence of technological devices in a postcolonial setting constitutes a site of cultural hybridity.

Just as the acquisition of technology has served in part to distinguish the First World from the Third World, the debate in film studies about what constitutes First Cinema versus Third Cinema has focused on the possession of capital and technology. The notion of a Third Cinema articulated in "Towards a Third Cinema" by Latin American filmmakers Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino defined a "cinema of liberation" engaged in "making films that directly and explicitly set out to fight the System" (52). The "System" alluded to here is a (specifically US) technology and capital-driven First Cinema offering purportedly apolitical entertainment. Solanas and Getino note that in "this long [anti-imperialist] war, with the camera as our rifle, we do in fact move into a guerilla activity" (57). They thus advocate implementing a film-as-weapon strategy in Third Cinema filmmaking praxis, which eschews the high technology of the First Cinema machine: "The myth of irreplaceable technicians must be ex-

ploded" (58). Third Cinema, by necessity of the cost of film technology and by deliberate reaction against First Cinema as an instrument of US financial capital, is characterized by low quality of production.

A current debate circulating among postcolonial film scholars is whether the Third Cinema categorization per se is still necessary at this historical juncture, 20 years after its first articulation. Scott Cooper cites recent theoretical work which questions the need for continuing attention to Third Cinema as higher quality of production becomes more standard in Third World film.¹ Arguing against this association of low quality of production with political urgency, Cooper instead suggests that changing production practices and national contexts do not necessarily alter the original and continuing goal of Third Cinema as "a cinema of and for liberation" (69). However, even in this work—which tries to destabilize the importance of the technological axis—the technology debate remains mired in the Manichean opposition of the Third World's low technology versus the high technology of the West. Cooper himself agrees that the operating definitions of Third Cinema need to be revamped, noting that analysis "on which Third Cinema was based . . . need now be supplemented by more sophisticated models that take into account developments of multinational capitalism and struggles against neo-colonialism as they have evolved over the past twenty years" (67). This line of reasoning suggests the possibility that Third Cinema can be thoroughly political without necessarily embodying Solanas and Getino's original vision of a filmmaking practice diametrically opposed to Western methodology. It is this idea of a political Third Cinema unfettered by conventional definitions of Third World cinema as non-Western that I explore here.

Today, the division between East and West, in cinema and culture at large, continues to be perceived as a technological boundary. Wanting from these articulations is insight into how imported technology becomes situated within pre-existing cultural traditions; the debate has not dealt with the complex issue of the translation of technology into a Third World context. As technology forms the locus of the split between definitions of the

First and the Third Worlds, a re-examination of its discursive context uncovers opportunities for its reappropriation in the postcolonial setting. As such, technology has the potential to become a discursive space where identity can be renegotiated in terms of both the international and the national.

An analysis of *Perfumed Nightmare* in terms of the historical and political exigencies circulating during its production and distribution allows us insight into the role of technology in creating boundaries between East and West. In his film, Tahimik explores the impact of American military technology on Philippine national identity. Set on the outskirts of Manila and in the Parisian metropolis at the historical moment of the American bicentennial, *Perfumed Nightmare* relates the story of a *jeepney* driver who is enamored of American military technology. Hoping to become an astronaut at Cape Canaveral, he travels to Paris to work for an American businessman but becomes disillusioned by the human cost of technological progress. In a fantastical end sequence, he escapes in a culturally hybrid rocket ship fashioned from a Parisian garbage incinerator powered by Philippine typhoon winds. The film's visual imagery and sound track work together to create a vision of a new national identity forged out of a fusion of traditional (native) culture and appropriated (imported) technology. The film thus follows protagonist (and the director's alter ego) Kidlat Tahimik² through his "perfumed nightmare" of self discovery—Kidlat³ tracks the intoxicating scent of capitalistic and technological progress only to be jolted awake with the realization that his fantasized technological wonderland is actually a bad dream. The strength of the film lies in Kidlat's ingenious reappropriation of technology to find his own route to the stars.

Taking Tahimik's work seriously broadens and problematizes current expectations of the Third Cinema tradition. The sources and implications of technology both represented in the film and utilized in the making of the film engender a new vision of the stakes of technology for national identity in the postcolonial context. To contextualize this analysis properly, I conclude by grappling with the problematics of examining, from a Western scholarly perspective, a Filipino film distributed as an expressly Third Cinema product in the US.

In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon theorizes three stages through which national identity evolves within colonized spaces. In the first phase of “unqualified assimilation,” the native intellectual proves he has completely mastered the colonizer’s culture. In the second phase, the colonized subject realigns himself with traditional history and culture in an attempt to find his true identity. The third, “fighting” phase involves neither a nostalgic valuing of native tradition nor a privileging of imperialist culture but demands a new commitment to fight for a progressive national identity.⁴ Fanon locates the foundation of this identity in struggle: “The native intellectual nevertheless sooner or later will realize that you do not show proof of your nation from its culture but you substantiate its existence in the fight which the people wage against the forces of occupation” (223). For Fanon, the battle to create a unique culture out of the jumble of imperialist and native influences legitimizes a people’s national identity.

Drawing on Fanon’s model, Teshome Gabriel grounds his definition of fully developed Third Cinema vis-à-vis Western cinema. In “Towards a Critical Theory of Third World Films,” Gabriel argues that Fanon’s stages of national identity offer a critical framework for understanding the developmental phases of Third Cinema. Gabriel defines mature “Phase III” filmmaking (termed the combative phase as in Fanon’s model) as both political (“film-making as a public service institution” [33]) and narratively non-Western (told from “an ideological point-of-view instead of that of a character as in dominant Western conventions” [34]). Yet *Perfumed Nightmare*, an intensely political film, is built around the development of a central protagonist. Gabriel’s model is perhaps too simplistic to encompass adequately the variety encountered in Third World political filmmaking. His formulation of a mature Third Cinema does not do justice to the possibilities opened up by Fanon’s ideal “fighting phase,” which should consider the contributions and stakes of both sides in forming a new perspective. *Perfumed Nightmare* can be used as a working model in conjunction with the promise of Fanon’s fighting phase to complicate current understanding of Third Cinema.

In “The Commitment to Theory,” Homi Bhabha provides a useful intervention for working towards this more complex no-

tion of what a fighting phase might entail both in the Third World and its manifestation in Third Cinema. Bhabha suggests that the dilemma in defining the nature of Third Cinema is rooted in the role of the First World film community in setting the terms for the debate, and also posits an alternate course to investigate Third World film:

A large film festival in the West . . . never fails to reveal the disproportionate influence of the West as a cultural forum, in all three senses of that word: as place of public exhibition and discussion, as place of judgement, and as a market-place. . . . I want to take my stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement—that confounds any profound or authentic sense of a national culture or an organic intellectual—and ask what the function of a committed theoretical perspective might be, once the cultural and historical hybridity of the post-colonial world is taken as the paradigmatic place of departure. (113)

Bhabha hopes to move beyond Third Cinema as operationally defined by First World analysis and marketing to examine instead the aesthetics of Third Cinema through postcolonial culture's hybridity. The idea of a "committed theoretical perspective" indicates the need to keep any analysis politically rooted without straying too far into apolitical aestheticizing. Tahimik's treatment of technology in *Perfumed Nightmare*, both within the text and through its circumstances of production and distribution, serves as an important model of cultural hybridity. This model has implications both for national identity and Third Cinema, as the film simultaneously problematizes the place of technology in defining Third Cinema and Philippine post-colonial identity.⁵

Tahimik's film embodies the critical practice that Bhabha theorizes through locating its perspective in the hybridity of Philippine culture—his film begins to tear at the fabric of Third Cinema as First World tapestry and problematizes simple representations and straightforward dichotomies. While Tahimik, cognizant of Western film practice, does find sites for critique of it, he also has incorporated its strategies in his narrative. For instance, the film is structured as a Bildungsroman, but this Western convention is self-consciously and critically adopted. As J. Hoberman notes in *Village Voice*: "The pose of the eternal

innocent has long been a favorite American strategy for countering European cultural sophistication, and it is appropriately turned against us here" (48). *Perfumed Nightmare* is a many-layered hybrid: the juxtaposition of traditional Filipino music to multinational sound bites, the title as oxymoronic testament to the schizophrenic task of assimilating two cultures, the critique of technology and capitalism followed by formation of a new "cultural technology." Even the audience address is simultaneously national (as critique of imperialism) and international (as English-language film). Bhabha reminds us that the "people are now the very principle of 'dialectical reorganization' and they construct their culture from the national text translated into modern Western forms of information technology, language, dress" (130-31). For the postcolonial subject, Western cultural artifacts that have infiltrated the colonized's culture become as authentic a part of nationality as any traditional or native rite.

Tahimik's self-conscious appropriation and recontextualization of First World technology into a hybrid form takes us beyond the question of whether or not to utilize Western technology to the issue of how the assumptions and uses circulating around the discourse of technology can be altered to specifically subvert cultural imperialist practice. Tahimik refuses both the formulaic filmmaking of Hollywood proper and the support of the mainstream Philippine cinema, which, since its arrival on the tide of American colonialism in 1903, has been heavily influenced by Hollywood filmmaking sensibilities.⁶

Tahimik's filmmaking practice, while purposely low budget, is not necessarily anti-technological. He simply is unwilling to accept the Western discourse of high technology as better filmmaking. In "Cups-of-Gas Filmmaking Versus Full-Tank-cum-Credit Card Filmmaking [sic]," Tahimik notes that the action and excitement of Western film "may in fact be a crutch to disguise the lack of any inner quality, any profundity of spirit" (85). Tahimik has developed his own strategy of dissident filmmaking, which he explains as the commando approach, in "Benevolent Assassination," an interview with Patricia Zimmermann:

Cups of gas filmmaking is really like being a commando. You travel when you have the resources and stop when you don't. As a com-

mando, you also wait, take a few shots and retreat. It's not always a major battle plan. (9)

Tahimik rejects the categorization of Third Cinema, preferring to place his own epithet on his individual style of filmmaking. The commando metaphor, like Solanas and Getino's articulation of a guerrilla cinema, evidences the realities of Tahimik's political and economic situation, which necessitates deliberate yet judicious resistance. Unlike Solanas and Getino, he does not reject all Western influences. Tahimik is more interested in exploring the interconnections between native and imported technologies that shape a hybrid culture—Fanon's third phase.

Tahimik's concern with the role of technology in film production is evident in *Perfumed Nightmare*. In the Zimmermann interview, he notes that editing "has become such a sophisticated means of manipulation, although we don't realize it" (9). He deliberately makes the viewer cognizant of the editing process to highlight the political stakes of filmic representation. The overlaid soundtrack is purposefully disjointed from the visual image of the film, and both found footage (scenes of parades and national/military celebrations) and sound bites (from eminent personalities and the Voice of America) are liberally integrated into the body of the film. As Pat Aufderheide notes,

Tahimik also makes playful use of documentary and found footage, interwoven with his story and also commenting on it. Stealing lines from reportage of the dying and death of Francisco Franco, he makes up a newscast including a report of an anonymous eighty-year-old generalissimo, whose skeleton is on display at the funeral. Henry Kissinger arrives to bless the supermarket opening that shuts down Lola the egg vendor; Giscard d'Estaing is there to welcome little Kidlat when he first arrives in Paris. (2416)

The multicultural signifiers that shape Kidlat's identity are literally inserted into the body of the film, paralleling how Filipinos face relentless injections of foreign substance into the national culture by imperialist technology.

Tahimik's "Cups-of-Gas" filmmaking uses low budget cinematic technology specifically to highlight Western convention and proposes an alternate, specifically hybrid national identity based on the appropriation of technology. From a First World perspective the low-technology aesthetic at times becomes *the*

defining feature of Third World film, a move that strips the political urgency from the work in a national perspective to form a fetishized and purely aesthetic sensibility within an international perspective.

Films hailing from the Third World sporting low technology aesthetics become automatically equated with political progressivity as First World critics fetishize Third Cinema's low production quality. Hoberman describes *Perfumed Nightmare* as:

More underground than most Third World films, it's far more Third World than most underground ones. As a blueprint for an "undeveloped" cinema, I haven't seen anything comparable since Ousmene [sic] Sembene's *Black Girl* or the early films of the Brazilian *cinema novo*. (48)

Hoberman, while appreciating *Perfumed Nightmare* as particularly "Third World," eventually finds the film unconvincing because he cannot reconcile (the film's ending of) Kidlat's return to the mother's hut as a return to the Philippine homeland; he suspects that "Tahimik's disillusionment with the West has hardly been absolute" (48). Hoberman seems to desire a more complete rejection of the West to elevate *Perfumed Nightmare* to the status of classic Third Cinema as he sees it embodied by *Black Girl*. This is particularly problematic because the protagonist in *Black Girl* realizes that she cannot return home and is forced to commit suicide to escape the West. By contrast, *Perfumed Nightmare* offers a more hopeful vision through the notion of hybridity, allowing Kidlat to negotiate his own space within a postcolonial culture. While grudgingly admitting that the film is engaging enough to "likely become some sort of classic" (48), Hoberman is not sure what kind of classic that might be, since it does not fit completely his conception of Third Cinema. In focusing on the primitive aesthetic in an international context, Hoberman misses the political importance of the film in terms of Philippine national identity.

The concerns with technology, capitalism, and national identity found in international Third Cinema debates circulate concurrently within the narrative of *Perfumed Nightmare*. While it may have been appreciated for its aesthetics internationally, nationally Tahimik's filmic "commando attack" on technology, capitalism, and US imperialism was too political to escape notice by the

Marcos regime, which prevented national distribution of the Tagalog version of the film.⁷ This political reality provides an important framework for understanding the film. While reviewed on aesthetic terms in the West, this film is a political statement meant as a critique of the government in power and its ties with the US as an imperialist power. This circumstance makes it critical to examine the function of metaphor in the narrative.

In his reading of *Perfumed Nightmare*, Robert Silberman notes that metaphor becomes an important tool to transmit political messages in a repressive political climate:

In *The Perfumed Nightmare*, made under the Marcos regime, the revolution is figured through the image of the white carabao that embodies a mystical spirit of manhood and by statements about how butterflies will shed their cocoons—associated with American control—when the typhoon blows. . . . Such an indirect, metaphorical approach has been a staple in Latin America and the Eastern Bloc for decades. (75)

Utilizing a humorous and pseudo-autobiographical film style, Tahimik is able to criticize Marcos indirectly by lampooning Kidlat's search for the holy land of America. Despite a repressive political climate, Tahimik is able to create a critical narrative by camouflaging his political declarations in seemingly light-hearted parody.

Perfumed Nightmare resonates with possibilities for a national identity mediated through reappropriated Western technologies.⁸ The film's prelude establishes a bridge as the metaphorical site of contest between native and imperialist culture. In voice over, Kidlat narrates the history of the stone bridge that serves as the only way in and out of his hometown, Balian. Originally bamboo, it was rebuilt in stone by the Spaniards and almost reconstructed again as a strategic thoroughfare by the US army, an effort thwarted only by the strong winds of nearby Amok mountain. Tahimik portrays the grown Kidlat on the bridge in a succession of three closely spaced scenes, which narrate his struggle to find his identity on this site of cultural conflict. First, he pulls a small toy *jeepney* over the bridge and proclaims his identity: "I am Kidlat Tahimik. I choose my vehicle and I can cross this bridge." We again see Kidlat pulling a somewhat larger toy *jeepney* over the bridge as he proclaims: "I am Kidlat Tahimik. I

choose my vehicle and I can cross any bridge." On his third crossing attempt, Kidlat labors (unsuccessfully) to pull a full-size *jeepney* across the bridge. He announces: "Today, I am still trying to make that final crossing to freedom. I am Kidlat Tahimik. I choose my vehicle and can cross all bridges." As a multiple reconstructed site of nationality, the bridge embodies the struggle between traditional native wisdom (represented by both the "quiet strength" of bamboo and the fierce Philippine wind) and imported technologies of Spanish stone and American concrete. Kidlat is portrayed as both increasing his own self-confidence and simultaneously continuing his struggle with the vehicle of his journey to identity. The *jeepney* (itself a hybrid technology of American army jeep and Philippine handcraft) thus works as a convertible metaphor—it is both his transportation on his quest for freedom and the symbol for the struggle with technology. By coupling the evolution of Kidlat's identity with the struggle to handle an increasing burden of technology on this site of colonialist conflict, Tahimik's prelude suggests that this film will speak to a new vision of a national identity forged in the face of colonialist technology.

The main body of the film is structured around Kidlat's journey of self-discovery, a voyage that allows his development of a strong sense of national identity. Replicating Fanon's three stages of national evolution and its culmination in struggle, *Perfumed Nightmare* is a quest narrative that follows Kidlat's changing relationship to technology. Early in the film, the viewer is introduced to Kidlat as a *jeepney* driver who has been constructed (through a constant barrage of Voice of America radio broadcasts) to value American space exploration technology as the ultimate cultural achievement. Kidlat embodies Fanon's first stage concept of "unqualified assimilation" as he dreams of his village progressing technologically. He hopes to leave his village Balian and travel to America to meet his hero Werner von Braun, inventor of the rockets that sent American astronauts to the moon. Entranced by the technological superiority of America, he tells his mother: "I dream only of Cape Canaveral." Even the statue erected by his Werner von Braun Fan Club in Balian to honour the impending landing of the Viking space probe on

Mars venerates US technology. Kidlat tells club members that it "does not matter that the statue does not look like our hero, as long as it faces Cape Canaveral." Like Muslims bowing their heads toward Mecca, the statue pays homage to Kidlat's god of technology by facing the holy land, Cape Canaveral. The signifying hero of national identity reflects only the technological prowess of the colonizer's culture.

When Kidlat secures an opportunity to travel to the land of his dreams by working for the American businessman Big Boss (Hartmut Lerch), he vows to bring technology to his country upon his return. Before leaving Balian, he promises to get rich in America and return with a traffic light for the bridge into the village. While clearly meant as a humorous item (a traffic light can hardly be necessary for a tiny village with one road), the traffic light also signals mechanisms of control, allowing vehicles to pass or warning them to stop, serving as a gatekeeper to what influences may enter the village.

The metaphor of the bridge as a symbolic site where technology and identity are contested is reinvented upon Kidlat's arrival in Paris. Writing home, he wistfully notes that "Paris has twenty-six bridges. Why can't we have progress like this?" Technology, at first a tool of Western advancement and a metaphor for Western identity, now forwards the specific conception that a culturally progressive identity is attainable only through scientific achievement. Kidlat's entire self-understanding is mediated through his investment in this discourse which is transmitted to him through the language of Voice of America radio. The culture of technology is appropriately communicated to Kidlat through a transistor radio, which as both electronic device and transmitter of language constitutes a site where technology and discourse become inseparable.

Only after Kidlat encounters the human cost of progress through his experiences in Europe does he begin to question his own fascination with technology and progress. Upon his arrival in Paris, Big Boss tells Kidlat of his plan to get rich: "First the chewing gum, then the jeans, and one day the army jeeps, then jets. Progress, my boy, progress." As in Kidlat's worship of Cape Canaveral, progress is specifically conflated with military techno-

logy. To do his part, Kidlat labours to replenish Big Boss's gumball machines that are scattered about the city. The gumball machine is a metaphor for the concurrent impact of technology and capitalism. Tahimik lampoons capitalistic drive both with the ridiculous business plan forwarded by the buffoonish Big Boss and through multiple scenes of Kidlat clumsily pouring gumballs into plastic dispensers. Technology as progress becomes irrevocably intertwined with capitalism as Kidlat's dreams of space travel hinge upon Big Boss's success as a venture capitalist.

Kidlat's own progression towards a new identity is mediated also through the gumball machine as a symbol of technology. He spends his days slavishly following the ever-emptying gumball machines, chasing the dream of becoming an astronaut and bringing traffic signals home. In time, Big Boss tells Kidlat he has sold the business to run an American "blue-jeans" garment company and instructs Kidlat to pick out his favorite gumball dispenser as a souvenir. This leads to the turning point of the film, that is, the initiation of Kidlat's identity crisis. In an epiphanic moment, Kidlat travels to his favourite machine, at Orly's Concorde jetway, only to find it empty. The *mise-en-scene* juxtaposes the Concorde jet—his vehicle to the technological wonderland of Cape Canaveral—with the gumball dispenser. They are both empty vessels. Only then does Kidlat realize how empty his own slavish pursuit of technology has been, a moment that sparks his questioning of the importance of progress altogether.

The Parisian segment of the film cements the identification of technology with the advancement of capitalism through the character of Lola, who sells home-grown foods at the "Four Seasons" farmer's market and whose livelihood is threatened by the encroachment of a new supermarket. As Lola explains, each of her eggs contains a double yolk: "All our eggs have the same grandfather. Today everybody gets cheap synthetic eggs from the supermarket." Lola's eggs are "super-natural" and thus serve as a direct contrast to the supermarket. Her eventual loss of economic livelihood by the same "progress" that is to take Kidlat to Cape Canaveral serves as another catalyst that sparks Kidlat's questioning of technology.

Realizing the human cost of the progress he has been pursuing, Kidlat rejects his original beliefs and questions the need for

burdensome new technologies. Despairingly, he asks: "If the small chimneys work, why do we need superchimneys? If small markets work, why do we need supermarkets? If small airplanes work, why super flying machines?" In a rejection of technological progress that echoes Fanon's second stage, Kidlat remembers the wisdom of Kaja, a traditional Filipino bamboo craftsman and Kidlat's surrogate father, who throughout the narrative has urged a return to the values of the traditional homeland. Kidlat remembers Kaja's words: "Where is your true strength, Kidlat? Where is your real strength? The sleeping typhoon must learn to blow again." Kidlat's return to the values of his homeland is synonymous with his eschewal of technology, a move evidenced by his casting of stones at the supermarket, a symbolic if futile gesture of his frustration with progress.

Throughout the film, director Tahimik uses images of the natural as the antipode to technology to serve as metaphors of traditional Philippine identity. Both the image of the butterfly and the invocation of powerful typhoon winds are linked to the Philippine homeland. The first scene after the title credits consists of a forty-second view of rural landscape, a serene vista made complete by the gentle fluttering of butterflies. This pastoral scene, in stark contrast to the ensuing narrative dominated by the loud crackling of Voice of America radio broadcasts, establishes a visual and acoustic baseline, an invocation of the original status of the land.

Native tradition is communicated through the figure of Kaja, who functions in the film as the keeper blazoned with a giant tattooed butterfly, which connects him to the land. As a little boy, Kidlat quells his fear of American planes performing flyovers by burying head on Kaja's chest and he was soothed by the embrace of the butterfly—an action symbolizing safety in the return to native tradition.

Kaja also serves to transmit the metaphor of the Philippine typhoon winds as native strength and identity. It is Kaja who teaches Kidlat about the "quiet strength of bamboo" that can withstand the strongest wind, and who recounts the tale of Kidlat's father's death at the hands of American soldiers:

He did not need his rifle. Your father took a deep breath. He blew with a fury that knocked the guard down. Stronger than the winds of

Amok mountain, Kidlat. Fifteen more Americans fell before they finally stopped your father. Kidlat, when the typhoon blows off its cocoon, the butterfly embraces the sun. The sleeping typhoon must learn to blow again.

The powerful winds of the Philippines are repeatedly referenced as capable of thwarting American imperialist interests. Kaja's wisdom suggests that the natural resources of the nation can be brandished as a weapon in the fight against the encroachment of a technologically superior imperialist culture such as the US. The force of nature, both unpredictable and uncontrollable, figures as an important parable of resistance, a power unassailable by the cultural and/or militaristic forces of the US.

However, the return to the power of the native cannot ultimately provide the final solution to Kidlat's vexing crisis of identity. As was his father's summons of the typhoon winds, his stone-throwing proves to be a futile mode of resistance. For all his wisdom, Kaja is also a figure of the past, as evidenced by his insistence on tradition and history. Kaja's connection to the tradition of the homeland makes the international inaccessible. Kidlat represents a more cosmopolitan figure through his access to the metropolitan space of Paris.⁹ The *jeepney* driven by Kidlat in the film depicts an alternative to the technologically driven mass production that threatens Lola's economy and Kidlat's identity. The *jeepney* is a particularly Philippine technological creation that is not fuelled by the mass production/personal destruction dynamic encountered in the Western world of Paris. In a particularly lyrical segment of the film, accompanied by the stylized percussion of workmen's hammers, Kidlat narrates how old American military jeeps are dismantled and reworked by hand into multicoloured, fantastically decorated open-air taxis—"Vehicles of war which we made into vehicles of life." The hand-crafted transformation from drab army jeep to bright and colourful *jeepney* is a technological version of the metamorphosis experienced by the Philippine butterflies, which, freed from their cocoons by the typhoon winds, burst out to embrace the sun. Tahimik's play with nature and technology suggests a non-militaristic application of foreign machinery is possible. As the butterflies find freedom in shedding their cocoons, the *jeepneys* represent a freedom from imperialism that can be found

through technology metamorphosed in the cocoon of the Philippines. The disjunction between the wonder of the individually crafted farm eggs and mass-produced artificiality of supermarket eggs and plastic gumball machines finds its resolution in the hand-crafted appropriated technology of the American jeep turned Philippine *jeepney*.

In *Perfumed Nightmare*, Kidlat's solution to his personal identity crisis resonates with Fanon's hope for the "fighting phase," with national identity situated in the struggle to cull a new societal character out of the ashes of a traditional culture destroyed. Kidlat's fighting phase involves the re-appropriation of the technology he initially rejected. He forges his new identity by appropriating elements of the colonizer's culture and reworking them for his benefit. In voice-over, Kidlat drafts his own Declaration of Independence, parodying the American document, and severs his ties with "those who would build bridges to the stars." In a final appropriation of foreign technology, Kidlat commandeers a plastic Superchimney garbage burner, summons the Philippine typhoon winds, and launches towards the sky in this rocketship of his own design.

As demonstrated through the character of Kidlat in *Perfumed Nightmare*, Tahimik eschews the complete rejection of foreign influence in favor of an aesthetic that discriminately picks particular, useful (in this case technological) aspects of imperialist discourse. In his interview with Patricia Zimmermann, he notes of his filmmaking strategy:

Now whether I'm slaying the father or teaching other Filipinos how to slay the father, I ask, "will my film reach the people who need to slay their father?" If I can influence anybody along this line, I say, let's analyze the father and see where he is: you don't have to slay him totally. You can be selective. . . . (7)

The message that Tahimik chooses to emphasize is the urging for *selectivity* in rejecting the colonizer's culture. He recognizes that the cultural elements to which a postcolonial subject has been exposed in his lifetime cannot merely be separated into either "native" and "imperialist." Rather, since everything which formulates one person's cultural identity is necessarily part of that

person's culture, concrete distinctions become impossible to make.

Tahimik's concept of selectivity has affinities with the post-colonial hybridity theorized by Homi K. Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*. On the move away from a colonizer/colonized cultural dialectic, Bhabha says:

Colonial hybridity is not a *problem* of genealogy or identity between two *different* cultures which can then be resolved as an issue of cultural relativism. Hybridity is a problematic of colonial representation and individuation that reverses the effects of colonialist disavowal, so that other "denied" knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority—its rules of recognition. (114)

Hybridity allows the colonized subject to subvert the authority of imperialist cultural icons and instead create a space where the reinterpreted meaning of cultural texts imbues the colonized subject with agency.

In *Perfumed Nightmare*, Tahimik plays with colonialist texts, selectively subverting their meaning to convey a new vision of the national. Bhabha posits that the hybrid is the "re-evaluation of the symbol of national authority as the sign of colonial difference" (114). In Tahimik's film, two items that have through imperialist legacy served as signifiers of nationality, the stamp and the passport, are reworked within the framework of technological discourse to produce a different vision of national identity.

Silberman reads *Perfumed Nightmare* as a satire in which the family serves as a metaphor for issues facing Philippine society:

Thus *The Perfumed Nightmare* concludes with Tahimik's mother . . . lowering the bamboo window covering in her home. It is an image of the ties binding the protagonist to his native land, a sign of his determination to return home again from Europe, and a conclusion to the concern throughout the narrative with the tradition of bamboo construction and native traditions. . . . The main character's infatuation with America . . . is the acting out of his choice of a false father—a mistake corrected in his return home at the end of the film. (72)

Silberman misreads the film as advocating a rejection of Western influence by ending his analysis with the shot of the mother's

bamboo home. While this scene signals the end of the narrative proper, it is by no means the end of the film. The end credits reference issues raised within the body of the film and significantly contribute to its conclusions. The sequence features the end-titles typed on postcards stamped with postage of various third world nations which feature rockets, lunar modules or astronauts of the American space program. The last postcard features a hand-drawn "stamp" of Kidlat sitting on his Superchimney rocket surrounded by the moon and stars, the destination he originally hoped to reach as an American astronaut. He has found his way but on his own terms and significantly through his own technology. It is a solution that melds appropriation of imported technology with the driving power of native strength and identity.

Kidlat's journey of self-discovery symbolically ends in space. The cosmos, in contrast to the multiply colonized space of the Philippines, has not (yet) been invaded.¹⁰ Kidlat's escape into the void expresses a final wish for a place where culture, as absent, can be reinvented, an ironic testament to the difficulty of finding a national identity in a multiple colonized country. A more hopeful reading requires a return to Kidlat's inventive solution to space travel. Ironically, the US's furthest manned venture into space, the moon shot, was less a "giant leap for mankind" than an extension of the same Cold War militaristic posturing which produced the continued US military presence in the Philippines. Kidlat rejects American space technology and yet ends up in space. Unlike the great space race, Kidlat's journey to the stars is not a small step towards conquering the world, but a giant leap towards reacquiring identity.

By displaying the Third World stamps of American space achievement in the concluding credits, Tahimik is referencing an already existing Third World subversion of American technological and cultural imperialism. Third World nations issue American space theme stamps popular with US philatelists in order to raise hard currency. An image unrelated to native cultural identity becomes reappropriated to serve the interest of the colonized nation. Postage stamps, issuable only by govern-

ments,¹¹ also forward political images and support particular political agendas in many nations.¹² Tahimik recognizes the technology of stamp production as an important site for the propagation of images of national identity, and subverts both governmental control of the institution and imperialist importation of technology. Tahimik ends the film with his hand-drawn postage stamp featuring Kidlat in his cosmic habitat—a non-governmental figure displaying an image of national identity. As a deliberately non-mass produced image, the hand-drawn stamp again recalls Tahimik's satire on mass production, the ridiculing of the plastic superchimneys and gumball machines. Tahimik's unique vision of a "cultural technology" has managed to remove it from associations with both militarism and capitalism. Like the superchimney, the discourse of technology has been hijacked and re-appropriated.

This hand-drawn image, in continuity with the stamps that precede it, portrays space technology, but although it is similar, it is transformed as well. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha notes "the display of hybridity—its peculiar 'replication'—terrorizes authority with the *ruse* of recognition, its mimicry, its mockery" (115). The technology depicted is no longer America's invention but Kidlat's. He has taken international technology and made it his own. The stamp-image as strategic counterfeit constitutes a stunning display of hybridity. Tahimik has appropriated a site of governmental control and image-making to codify his own vision of the national, mocking both American imperialism and Philippine government complicity.

The image of the astronaut also resonates with Solanas and Getino's original articulation of Third Cinema. In *Towards a Third Cinema*, the authors, critiquing the dominance of Western imperialism in all areas of culture, science included, note that "An astronaut or a Ranger mobilizes all the scientific resources of imperialism" (46). Tahimik shows his awareness and commitment to Third Cinema practice and yet simultaneously moves beyond that earlier formulation by turning Solanas and Getino's example of imperialism back on the colonizer. Rather than utilizing technology to further imperialist goals, Tahimik's astro-

naut has brought both imperial and native technologies to bear and forged a more hopeful hybrid national identity.

Tahimik similarly implicates camera technology in creating imperialist images of the national. As Kidlat poses for a passport photo, the film camera is positioned with the point of view of the still-photo camera, framing Kidlat's face as he smiles for his portrait. With the long take on Kidlat's face, the image of Kidlat becomes synonymous with the image of the national subject. The photograph serves as an identifier of the personal in a national context (the passport labels his national identity) just as the film serves to identify the national in an international context (the film constitutes Philippine identity to international viewers). By thus conflating the personal with the national, Tahimik engenders a critique of "labelling" either person or country so easily.

As evidenced by these juxtapositions of the personal and the national, Tahimik is conscious of the stakes of identity politics, and highlights these concerns within the film. When Kidlat leaves on his journey to Europe, Tahimik intercuts scenes of Kidlat's small sending-off party in Balian with footage of national parades and a soundtrack featuring thousands of people cheering. Conflating private memory and public history through this lighthearted parody, he calls attention to his own positionality, a last reminder that any narrative cannot easily be interpreted as embodying the ideals of an entire nation, or of the entire Third World. In the same manner, the interpretation I offer of this film can also not be the only one, and any theoretical investigation into the Philippine national space and/or Third Cinema aesthetics and practice needs to be balanced against that insight. To contextualize properly my reading requires an understanding of the historical and political currents that circulate around this film and the circumstances of its production and distribution.

The low technology aesthetic provides the particular context for *Perfumed Nightmare's* introduction to the West. For Francis Coppola, the motivation to distribute the film in the US through his Zoetrope studios seems to be purely artistic rather than political. An analysis of Coppola's commentary is useful here

because it both highlights the emphasis placed on technology in judging film aesthetics and concomitantly delineates the dangers of an apolitical aesthetic practice.

Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse, which documents the filming of Coppola's 1979 film *Apocalypse Now* in the Philippines, gives some insight into Coppola's ideological investments in filmmaking. While ostensibly critiquing the US presence in Vietnam through *Apocalypse Now*, Coppola unwittingly replicates the imperialist ideology that led to the Vietnam war. Despite his desire to film *Apocalypse Now* as testimony to the insanity of colonialist/imperialist practice, he nevertheless pays Ferdinand Marcos a considerable sum of money to film in his country, in effect funding Marcos's repression of communist insurgency in an eerie replication of the US Vietnam agenda. One stunning scene in *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmaker's Apocalypse* documents how helicopters from Marcos's army (and piloted by Philippine pilots) are called away in the midst of shooting a scene from *Apocalypse Now*. The helicopters, which are staging the attack on a coastal Vietnam village, leave to crush the latest Communist rebel attack a few miles away in the Philippine hills. Coppola fumes about his inability to keep to his production schedule when the helicopters depart, noting: "Here I am with about fifty things that are just quasi under my control like the Philippine government," assuming he has the right to control the national space of the Philippines in the same way the US government has since its annexation of the islands in 1898. Coppola's irritation with his inability to control the Philippine military coupled with his obliviousness to the parallel of shooting film footage with shooting Communists epitomize the problems of First World representation of Third World politics.

Eliding Third World politics, the Hollywood filmmaker conceptualizes film as a purely artistic medium that cannot reach its full potential without its release from capitalism and technology. In this vein, Coppola consciously scripts himself as a self-effacing artist struggling to overcome Hollywood constraints. Alluding to the nightmare of "too much money" that was Coppola's burden in producing a meaningful film, *Hearts of Darkness: A Filmmakers*

Apocalypse ends with the director's opinion of what constitutes great art:

To me the great hope is that now these little 8 mm video recorders have come out. Some just people [sic] who normally wouldn't make movies are going to be making them. Suddenly someday some little fat girl from Ohio is going to be the next Mozart and make a beautiful film with her father's little camera-recorder, and for once the so-called professionalism about movies will be destroyed forever—and it will really become an art form. That's my opinion.

Himself a high-budget Hollywood filmmaker, Coppola oddly reverses the technological axis to associate "great" film with low technology (an association made unfortunately patronizing and paternalistic by Coppola's choice of the "little fat girl" as his prototype non-Hollywood filmmaker). The association of the disenfranchised with low technology is problematic by itself, in that it squashes the possibility that a woman or person of color might make notable, high budget, films. It is important to interrogate this concern with aesthetics uncoupled from politics. Tahimik's film is quite political in terms of addressing issues of postcolonial culture within the Philippines, but it also has aesthetic roots in Western literature. Certainly not anti-Western, he is instead advocating a hybrid approach to negotiating cultural identity in the postcolonial space. Since his message is as much aimed at the US as the Philippines, international distribution is important. As demonstrated above, it is certainly not without its problems, but Tahimik is cognizant of the problems involved, since it is precisely the tension between imperialist and native points of view that his film attempts to negotiate.

An aesthetic coupled with political analysis makes for a richer understanding of Third World positionality as seen through Third Cinema. Examining the sources and implications of both technology represented within the film and the technology utilized in the making of the film highlights the importance of technology in constituting national identity. The too simple conceptualization of technology as either vital tool of progress or imperialist destroyer of native culture needs to be discarded in favour of a more complex model, where technology can be understood as another cultural site for negotiating national identity.

With the current debate in postcolonial studies attempting to forge more complex notions of Third Cinema, Tahimik's work can serve as a model for suggesting new parameters in the negotiations of Third Cinema definition and practice. Especially since so much of the debate circulates around issues of technology, Tahimik's vision of a hybrid "cultural technology" provides a fresh option for rethinking technology not simply as a First World contribution transplanted but as a cultural signifier refigured in a Third World context. This analysis has the potential to create a more vibrant view of Philippine national cinema as well as force a reevaluation of the nature of politically engaged Third Cinema worldwide.

Silberman notes that "Kidlat Tahimik is by no means a mainstream filmmaker; in fact his films are perhaps better known abroad than at home" (71). That may be changing. In "Philippine Writing in English: Postcolonial Syncretism Versus a Textual Practice of National Liberation," E. San Juan, Jr. (1991) suggests Tahimik may play an important part in Philippine national politics:

No contemporary literary text . . . has so far exercised the role of a central ideological signifier that could generate a national-popular culture with overwhelming mass appeal sufficient to mobilize an interclass bloc which could successfully challenge the US-supported oligarchic elite and its intelligentsia. A likely candidate for this status would be the cinema-texts of Lino Brocka and of Kidlat Tahimik (if the latter's films are thoroughly popularized). . . . (83)

While still not commonly celebrated within the Philippines, Tahimik's work is recognized in some Filipino circles as a potential signifier of the national. Despite being made more than 20 years ago, Tahimik's 1976 film still resonates with issues that are contemporary and urgent. This analysis of his work—considered from a Western perspective—cannot hope to redefine Third Cinema. That would simply be reinscribing the problem of the First World setting the terms of the debate. I am simply suggesting that a consideration of the discourse of technology within the postcolonial space merits close attention and could be useful in preparing more sophisticated and relevant models of Third Cinema films as signifier of national identity in both national and international contexts.¹³

NOTES

- 1 While I use the terms First/Third World and First/Third Cinema throughout this paper, I do so to clarify my argument in relation to the historical circumstances of the debate. The project of this paper is partly to highlight the problematic nature of these terms and to begin to move away from such diametric oppositions in favor of more hybrid notions of culture.
- 2 Tahimik's birth name is Eric de Guia. He has adopted the name of his first film's protagonist, *Kidlat Tahimik*, which means "quiet lightning."
- 3 To distinguish between the character and the director, I will use "Kidlat" when discussing the character within the diegesis of the film and "Tahimik" in reference to the director.
- 4 By invoking the Fanonian paradigm, I do not mean to suggest all individuals in a postcolonial culture engage in this transformation, which does require particular circumstances, not the least of which is the opportunity and/or willingness to equip themselves with the colonizer's language. My analysis of Tahimik's work cannot be generalized to all postcolonial situations but suggests possibilities for the negotiation of cultural identity through reappropriation of technology.
- 5 While Tahimik's film might serve as a useful model for a re-examination of Third Cinema and/or discourses of technology, it must be considered that this type of technological negotiation may not be possible in every postcolonial context, especially where the colonizing group's military or industrial technology has decimated native populations or cultures.
- 6 In "The History and Prospects of the Filipino Film," Bienvenido Lumbera traces the conditions that shaped Philippine cinematic production. With the importation of Hollywood technology, Philippine cinema developed around Hollywood production standards, and competition with a large quantity of Hollywood films prompted Filipino filmmakers to compete for audiences by copying Hollywood genres. Moreover, film investors from the elite Filipino and foreign classes prevented politicized representation of Filipino history. The result was that "Movies generally avoided realism in depicting social problems . . . and avoided topics that would offend the American caretakers of the Commonwealth" (22).
- 7 See Pat Auferderheide, "The Perfumed Nightmare (*Mababangong Bangungot*)."
- 8 This case is specific to the Philippines as a colonized culture with a US military/technological presence. Other Asian nations with a US presence (such as Japan, a highly industrialized, non-colonized society that prides itself on its homogeneity) have had different responses to imported American technology.
- 9 This access makes *Kidlat* in one sense a more privileged character than *Kaja*. However, I do not necessarily mean to present *Kidlat* as a truly cosmopolitan figure and I want also to be wary of overvaluing the importance of cosmopolitanism. In *Salman Rushdie and the Third World*, Timothy Brennan argues that third world cosmopolitan artists (who have incorporated what are deemed particularly Western modes of representation within their work) are more validated by first-world observers because of the familiarity of their narrational strategies. While this is a valid concern, I believe that considering Tahimik's origin in the polyglot Philippine community, to suggest that American/European influences are not a "true" part of Tahimik's culture is to elide the very identity struggles that constitute this film. Entry into the international may provide access to power that could well prove vital to a radical reworking of identity politics.
- 10 Although one can argue that the space of Earth's upper atmosphere is already colonized by satellite technology, which serves as the mechanism through which a large portion of Western media reaches the Third World.
- 11 The sole exception is the United Nations, the only non-governmental body with the authority to issue postage stamps.

- ¹² See Franceska Rapkin, "A Miniature Guide to Geography," and Donald Malcolm Reid, "A Window on Saddam Hussein's Iraq," for discussion of postage stamps and their uses by national governments.
- ¹³ The author would like to thank Mia Carter for critical evaluation of this manuscript and Walter Metz for suggesting the relevance of Coppola's work to this project and critical readings and discussions of this manuscript.

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