

Speaking Directly: Oral Histories of the Moving Image

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Kidlat Tahimik

by Aily Nash

“When you work with the cosmos, suddenly you get ideas for how to treat some visuals, like some images that had no intention of being in the film. That’s the freedom of the independent.”

Distinguished by their playfulness, exuberance, and relentless questioning of the status quo, Kidlat Tahimik’s films function on many fronts—the cosmic, the personal as political, and as advocacy for the notion of the *indie-genius*. Tahimik was raised in the Philippines during the US occupation, and his work teases out the complexities of a formative condition: namely, participating in a rich cultural heritage that is in danger of being degraded by the hegemonic effects of American culture. Yet his films manage to never polarize, polemicize, or simplify; rather, they exhibit a generous and gentle wisdom, offering incisive observations about the ways in which the political impacts all of our lives. Tahimik’s first film, the groundbreaking *Perfumed Nightmare* (1977), impressed international critics and filmmakers such as Susan Sontag, J. Hoberman, Werner Herzog, and Francis Ford Coppola. He went on to make several other acclaimed works including, *Memories of Overdevelopment* (1980-present), *Why is Yellow the Middle of the Rainbow?* (1980-94), and *Turumba* (1981).

Kidlat Tahimik was in New York for his US retrospective tour in New York in the fall of 2012 during his US retrospective tour, which was organized by Jed Rapfogel of Anthology Film Archives, and myself. It took place at Anthology, the Harvard Film Archive, and the Pacific Film Archive; it also included visits to the New Orleans Film Festival, Tulane University, Bard College, Ramapo Collage, and Basilica Hudson.

This interview was conducted over a series of meals during Kidlat's stay in New York—long breakfasts and dinners in Hudson, and a lunch in Brooklyn during the Sandy black-out. Special thanks to Ted Kennedy and Ben Rivers for their presence and input during some of these conversations.

Aily Nash: How did you end up living in Paris and Munich in the late-sixties, early-seventies, and what led you to filmmaking?

Kidlat Tahimik: During my undergraduate in theater at the University of the Philippines, I was a really happy and carefree guy, but then I was accidentally elected the president of the student government. First, I was elected one of the representatives of the college of arts and sciences. On the first Saturday after the elections, representatives from the different colleges get together and select a chairman. Usually it's a law student or business student who runs for that position because they know their ambitions when they're in school. But that year, my fraternity saw that the law student was very weak. So they maneuvered, made some alliances, and suddenly – ahhh – I'm speaking in front of 18,000 students, talking about nationalist policies, and leading rallies to Malacanang, the equivalent of the White House in the Philippines. By year's end, I began to see myself as "*presidentiable*," since lots of campus leaders in my school eventually ended up in national politics. It's not that it was my ambition, but I thought maybe I was a potential president.

There was this little voice, from I don't know where: "A developing country needs economists, *not artists!*" So I shifted majors and went for an MBA in finance at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School. Thus, I ended up in Paris as an economist at OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) an organization of the rich countries to coordinate aid policies. I worked there for five years — in a three-piece suit!

Maybe it's good to get to know the enemy inside you, what you don't want to be. But I still had this inkling to get back to theater. I joined the OECD theater club. I wanted to write this play, so one summer I took a break from my job in Paris to [go to] a farm in Norway. In the mornings I would pitch hay, and in the afternoons I would write my play on my little typewriter. But when I returned to Paris, I realized, to finish the play, I would have to take a sabbatical, a year or two. But I didn't have enough savings.

Nash: When was the point of no return, when you realized "I'm going to be an artist and I'm not going back to OECD in Paris"?

Tahimik: After working at the OECD, maybe my next career stepping stone would have been The World Bank, the dream of many Philippine economists. Either I was crazy or something flipped. I realized, "I don't need this life." You become dependent on your economist payroll so you can buy many bottles of champagne and Pierre Cardin suits, and live the comfortable bourgeois life in Paris, in your 16th arrondissement flat. One thing that



Photograph of Tahimik by Aily Nash.

helped: I met this old French actor who was a really funny, nice old Jewish man. He had acted in one film, *Borsalino* (1970). We'd gotten into a friendship. I moved into his big flat in the 16th. It was a way to meet non-economists. I was the boring economist at cocktail parties, compared to the crazy artists who didn't care what time it was. It was cosmic timing. As I was getting uncomfortable with "fertilizer distribution studies," I was meeting a lot of artists in Paris, and I began seeing possibilities outside the box. It was beyond my expectations that I would give up my job. But because I started writing a play and getting focused...just at that moment I was able to cut the cord. And jump out for a free fall.

I had written my play, and it wasn't getting anywhere. I met this Swiss fashion designer who was interested in doing fashion from Philippine shells. We flew home. I introduced her to some shell makers. She made a cocktail dress *collection de nacre* (mother-of-pearl). On our way back at Schiphol airport, I saw a Munich Olympic announcement with cute souvenirs displayed. I realized I could make these Olympic souvenirs. That was the turning point. By helping a fashion artist, I'd made contact with Philippine shell makers. So now I had the exotic materials and a global event. My bridge to becoming a playwright.

Each Olympics allow merchants to exploit their mascot. In 1972, it was the Dachshund, the sausage dog of Germany — on key-chains, T-shirts, throw-pillows — any conceivable kitsch. I proposed a dog mosaic out of mother of pearl, from which hung twenty-five shells. When the wind blew, it would make a nice sound. This was going to be my bridge to

freedom. I fanned out prototypes to rural families. A real cottage industry. Two thousand dollars yielded 25,000 Olympic dogs.

Nash: Just like in your film *Turumba*, you got a village to make paper mâché dogs. So that was your exit strategy?

Yeah, one last MBA bridge...and I was going to burn it afterwards. Why not? I wasn't necessarily selling my soul. The dogs were selling very well. Then the Olympic hostage crisis happened. The foul mood canceled all re-orders. So at the end of the Olympiad I was stuck in Munich, leashed to 25,000 dogs. I couldn't afford the student dormitory. I was invited to a commune of artists outside Munich. That's where I met my wife, and we had our first kid. There was also this crazy German film student doing crazy projects. He taught me to handle the 16mm Bolex camera. And how to make script-less films. He eventually played the American boss in my film [*Perfumed Nightmare*]. He hated being in front of the camera.

For his video exercise, he asked me and a Brazilian girl to be actors. We went to his film school. That week the professor was sick. The substitute professor was Werner Herzog. I didn't know he was a German New Wave director. After our exercise, he asked "Are you a professional actor?" I said no. Assured I was no Klaus Kinski, Herzog smiled: "*Sehr gut*. I don't like working with professionals." He took my address. Two months later he came to our commune and asked if I would play a role in *Kasper Hauser*.

Nash: What was your role?

Tahimik: There is a circus scene where Kaspar joins the freak show. Herzog revived five characters from his past five films...a mini retrospective of his works. From his film *Aguirre, the Wrath of God* (1972), I'm the Amazon Indian, "Hombrecito." As a circus freak, I obsessively play the flute because my tribe will survive only if I play it everyday. Then, we freaks do a jail break for freedom from the *zircusmeister*. These influences — being on a Herzog set, helping a film student, rule-flouting in the artist commune — made me think, "Hey, I want to get a 16mm camera." I had a super 8 camera and traded it with someone for a Bolex, and that's how I got to do *Perfumed Nightmare*.

Nash: How much knowledge of the history of film did you have when you started making films?

Tahimik: As children we were totally captive to Hollywood films. John Wayne, Marilyn Monroe, and all that stuff. So maybe they influenced me in the reverse. Working as an economist, I would go to the Paris Cinematheque of Henri Langlois. His Russian wife showed me all the randomly scattered rusty cans, un-indexed, archived only in their minds. I would watch lots of films after I arrived in Paris — just after May '68, in December. They were still having skirmishes between the students and CRS riot police. The anti-



Perfumed Nightmare (1977)

establishment air was still fresh, with tear gas canisters dispersing May Day demonstrations.

Nash: So were you going to see Godard films and other French movies coming out at that time?

Tahimik: I began to watch *Nouvelle Vague* films, but I can't remember those films. I was so slow reading the subtitles that I couldn't remember the visuals. By the time you look up, the shot is over. It's already the next line. My nouveau French — slow in reading, and my low vocab, combined with Godard's very cerebral texts — my *Nouvelle Vague* comprehension must have been through osmosis.

Maybe it was a blessing that I had gotten to know Godard only superficially. I don't know why people compare my films to Godard's. In London, four years ago, there was a big Godard retrospective. On the last day, films by other directors were shown—curated as “*Godard-esque*.” *Perfumed Nightmare* was included in this sidebar.

Until the 70s we hadn't developed a local film culture in the Philippines. In terms of



Perfumed Nightmare (1977)

intellectual influence (I have never been an avid reader), I was definitely strongly westernized by Hollywood visuals. But a significant seed planted was Werner Herzog's last word of advice when I left Munich: "Ahh Kidlat, you can never be *a good Bavarian director*." At first it sounded negative. But over the years I realized it was a profound cultural mirror he was holding up to this budding Filipino director: If I tried to be a German New Wave *regisseur* (or a Hollywood director), my films would always be second class compared to being an auteur filmmaker from your own culture. So Herzog was an influence. He was telling me to let my own cultural POV be the storyteller. Not the *Profit-Oriented Voyeur*, POV. Herzog, the rebel mentor, helped me set aside my Wharton MBA principles. Your Filipino *duende* should frame your film.

Nash: How do you think this influenced *Perfumed Nightmare*?

Tahimik: In the summer of 1976, I invited Herzog to the editing room to view *Perfumed Nightmare*. He was pleasantly surprised at my unorthodox, crude cut-n-paste: literally cut celluloid strip and glue it to the next. But Herzog said I had to work a bit more on it. I was particularly unsure about that sequence where I visit Germany and encounter the onion tower and the pregnant Bavarian lass (my wife, Katrin). Everyone I'd shown the work-in-

progress to agreed I must edit out the scene: “Yeah, we know you’re a new father and you want to include your new baby in the film.” They found it cute, but were all telling me throw out the scene. When I told Herzog I was insecure about that sequence he said, “Ahh, Kidlat, *you are best at your detours!*” So I kept the scene. Ever since then I became brave about my cultural whims and *duende detours*.

Another time, I had given Werner a four-page treatment of my Magellan film I was about to embark on. He was too busy to sit down to discuss the film. So he opened a window: “Look, Kidlat, I’m driving this weekend to show my film in a *kino* in Cologne...if you come, we can talk about your film.” So we drove 400 km, from Munich to Cologne, and another 400 km back. And we talked about the film. But I was surprised he had driven all that way for a handful of people—not more than twenty-five were in the audience. “Werner, you drive 800 km for this small audience?” He replied, “Ah Kidlat, we have to develop our audiences. I would drive up there even if there were only two and a half people.” That commitment has always been an influence on me.

Nash: Aside from following your *duende* through your process, you’re also always collaborating with the cosmos, the way you come upon some moments in life that work into your films.

Tahimik: 1982 was the first time Asian films were invited to Japan. Japan Foundation sponsored a visit by 12 Asian film directors. We had a dinner with Akira Kurosawa in Hakone. On the tatami mat I sat beside his assistant, Ms. Nogami, who worked with him for over 30 years. I asked him, “Sensei, when I see your films everything is so well-studied and planned — up to the last button of the samurai. The colors of the leaves, one feels are all included in your production design. Do you ever *allow the cosmos* to bring in a suggested moment that’s not in the script or art design?” Kurosawa reflected; “Hmm...sometimes, I consult my ancestors.” I’m not sure what he meant. Did it mean consulting his *duende*? Every time after that, when I meet Ms. Nogami, she always calls me Mr. Cosmos.

In 1987, the writers’ conference at Duke University was on the narrative. They were trying to include film as the contemporary narrative. As an experiment they invited three filmmakers. There was me, Ousmane Sembene, from Senegal, and Tomás Gutiérrez Alea, the Cuban — but he didn’t arrive because of visa issues. I showed four of my films over three days. They were using films as a convenient break between lectures. After awhile you get tired of scholarly presentations. One afternoon, a bored Japanese writer asked me, “You want to take a walk in the park?” It was Kenzaburo Oe, later a Nobel prize-winning novelist. (I’m not a reader, so I didn’t know the name — like Tarkovsky, just another guy I was meeting on the cosmic road.) By then he’d seen my films.

As we were walking, he said, “Tahimik-san is sort of a Kurosawa of the Philippines.” I protest, “But Kurosawa-san’s films are perfect. I’m sloppy...very wild.” I was shocked at the

comparison because I see his works as the standard of filmmaking perfection. You can feel in each shot, production values are multiplied 108 times. Oe clarified, “No, not in cinematic grandeur...Films of Tahimik-san and Kurosawa-san are windows...Kurosawa-san’s films open windows to the Japanese soul... Tahimik-san’s films open windows to the cosmos.” Wow! If “Japanese soul” meant Kurosawa’s ancestors, does this mean my cosmic ancestors are possibly aliens? Last month a Japanese professor, told me Oe created a character in his next novel, based on me. It’s an image he got from the *Turumba* film, a Filipino *papier mâché* maker.

Nash: You mention Ogawa Shinzuke in the *Yellow* film. What was your relationship with him?

Tahimik: Ogawa Shinzuke was another rebel filmmaker. He filmed displaced farmers who were battling the Narita airport. He really joined them in the pitch battles with his 16mm Bolex. But then later he reflected, “Why am I fighting for the farmers? I don’t even know who they are, how they think, what they feel.” So with his whole crew, they rented a farm to live with farmers, to get to know them. Then he got interested in filming their life styles, their philosophies, their rice gods.... The Ogawa *homage* in my *Yellow* film included his macro-shots filming the fertilization within a chaff of rice. Wow, he even got obsessed with recording the sound of a rice chaff popping open!

As he relocated to Yamagata, Ogawa convinced the city to host Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival which began in 1989. He put me in a list of Asian invitees. There we made a manifesto, to not allow Asian docs to die. *Why is Yellow Middle of Rainbow* was the opening film in 1989. It was invited back 2 times, because it was a growing doc — like my kids. He died in 1994 after a bout with cancer. Before that he gave me his Canon Scoopic 16mm camera. We had a common bond because we were both doing similar filmmaking as “*romantic guerrillas*.” My move to live with the Ifugao tribe, in their rice terraces, is inspired by Ogawa’s goal to learn from ancestral wisdom.

Nash: Many of your films have some kind of journey in them, travels with your kids, with filmmakers. There is a sequence from *Why is Yellow*... which is footage from a road trip you were on with Tarkovsky.

Tahimik: Right after the 1983 Robert Flaherty Film Seminar, I came down from the Adirondacks to NYC. The next day, news headlines were about the assassination of Senator Aquino, whose widow Cory with the yellow ribbon, became the symbol of opposition to Marcos’ dictatorship. (Hence, the original title of the film *I am Furious Yellow*.) Headed home, my last stop was San Francisco. I called up Tom Luddy, [then] curator of the Pacific Film Archives and of the Telluride Film Festival. Among the dozens of film celebrities every year, he invites five or six filmmakers for a week-long drive from Las Vegas to Telluride. They could de-jetlag while cruising the great outdoors: Monument Valley, Canyon de Chelly, Grand Canyon. When I called, he said, “You haven’t been to Telluride. Come join us!” I met

them in Las Vegas, and we started the overland drive.

And, yes there was a Russian director. It was Andrei Tarkovsky. I didn't even know who he was! Also Krystof Zanussi too... the Hungarian director who was our translator. At a spectacular Monument Valley sunset, Tarkovsky quipped a joke in Russian. They were laughing loud. Zanussi translated: "Only Americans can be so stupid — shooting only *bang-bang films* in this very spiritual setting!" John Ford must have turned over in his grave. With my 16mm Bolex, I started shooting these caucasians meeting the Navajo horseman. I was just documenting what was interesting...not film personalities. When I got home I had the film rolls developed. The rushes were so murky. I had shot film that was four years expired. But I could see a story. I decided to call it *Parable in a Film Can Found in the Desert*. It's in the later part of *Why is Yellow*.... So I added a shot of a rusty film can lying in the Arizona desert (where John Wayne had shot a lot of redskins). It became a nice little sequence, and the visual murkiness fit — as if projected from a Third World projector.

When you work with the cosmos, suddenly you get ideas for how to treat some visuals, like some images that had no intention of being in the film. That's the freedom of the independent. Normally when you're making a film, it's almost pre-set, what elements will go in, so it will have "a *unified structure*." But for me, I shoot so many things impulsively, that once I start editing a film, suddenly there is an imperative for this obscure shot to come in here...or there. You keep juggling until you find an organic flow. You don't have a script, you just do it by feel. You're surprised that audiences like it.

Nash: And *you* end up being "the unified structure" behind the film...

Tahimik: Yeah, the unique worldview of your personal *duende* frames the "unified structure." It is an inner urge: "my story has got to be told/shared." So, maybe the urgency isn't that strong — if you can't let go of your "film school" anchors. The rules of the game (profit formula) puts a straightjacket on your *duende's* storytelling. Story-wise, you have to slay the father. What would "the unified structure" of my debut film *Perfumed Nightmare* have been like if my MBA frame was king? The only good film is a *mall-able* film.

So I couldn't have the euphoric ending of yellow-clad protestors proclaiming, "Liberty! Equality! Fraternity!" Making the *Yellow* film, my *duende* saw clearer the problem was not GDP or per capita incomes, but a *kultur* problem. We're ignoring our *indigenous/indie-genius* strengths, because our leaders are trying so hard to follow the efficiency manuals of Wharton or Harvard business schools to please the World Bank. We lost touch with the holistic cultural-bakes of our forefathers. "Get from nature only what you need." *Its not the MBA dream, stupid!* That's the second half [of the film]. I end up not knowing how to finish this film. My son says in the film, "Hey dad, you better finish your film quick. My voice is changing!"



Tahimik with Aily Nash. Photograph by Peggy Ahwesh.

Ted Kennedy: Is the whole process different layers of intuitive action, the reduction and selection?

Tahimik: I'm constructing an artist village, where indigenous artists can hone their art. It's been four years of building without a blueprint. No architectural plan. No *maximized rental space* formula. It's like, I've accumulated so much recyclable junk heaped together. Suddenly, I know...ahhh, that one, odd-shaped, wood debris I picked up last typhoon. I find it and voila! It falls into place *precisely*...because it wasn't in the plan!

Intuitively, something is linking your search engine to something you feel is perfect for the moment. It's the same with film. Maybe, initially, visuals start consciously (scripted). Let's say you aren't shooting yet, but an impulse pushes you to start cranking the camera for unscripted footage...Sometimes I get an idea of what accent to put in this corner of the art village, because a carpenter accidentally left a plank there. Similarly, I was editing particular shots for the *Yellow* film. Our musician visitors were jamming in the basement. An improvised musical phrase drifted into my ears — which sounded swell with pictures I was editing— *prssssskkk!* I rushed down the stairs. Play it again, Sam! Then I nailed that improvisation into the track. It wasn't a score that *stayed on track*. Rather a heaven sent sound byte that *strayed on track*.

Straying on track. That's the story of my life...How my script-less films come together... Or how my art center "happens" — sans blueprints.... Or how an Olympic hostage crisis detoured me into a hippie commune at age 33 — to meet a film student with a Bolex 16mm camera. Both in living life or in the shooting process, you don't know why certain junk gathers dust...whether in your room or in your film vault. But when you're editing, the most remote sequence will come back to you. Of course, what comes to your head isn't always what works, but at least it gets recalled, and tested.

That's the best way I can describe my intuitive process. Sometimes shots I took 2 years ago, 10 years ago...you've developed a distance from the shots. But when you're getting involved in a fresh storyline, your intuition will untie that shot from the literal meaning it had — when you shot it long ago. Looking at it a decade later may have given you cosmic distance — so that the shot can fit better — in a totally new context. Or in a new film!

*

After returning home from his US tour, Kidlat announced his intention to resume production on his film *Memories of Overdevelopment*. He sent us the following addendum to his interview:

Dear Aily,

It's midnight here in the Philippines, 12 noon your time in NY. (Hey, we're globally polar—in terms of sunshine.) Can you stretch your press deadline — to sunrise tomorrow 7am EST — actually sunset 7pm on my side of the planet?

Guess what — I've revived the circumnavigation! My film about Magellan's slave got winds in its sails again. The last 3 weeks, this septuagenarian cineaste is shooting again "Memories of Overdevelopment!" (MOD)

Going over our post-Sandy interview, the focus of your questions was on the *role of cosmos* in my script-less storytelling. Can we help our readers close the circle, with a most recent example of *weaving the cosmic narrative*? A few flashbacks will recall a reality show: how the MOD film, which started 1980, is being revived 33 years later — in fact 3 years after Anthology Film Archives began a "*mission impossible*" to make a USA tour of Kidlat films happen.

With hindsight, the 2012 USA tour found KT viewing *Memories of Overdevelopment* on the big screen six times in four weeks, in 6 cities (film-cum-performance). Was this a *cosmic fertility rite* that planted seeds for the revival?

Postscript to an Unscripted Cosmic Film Trip

The 33-year film-in-progress of Kidlat Tahimik might still make it back to homeport...in this lifetime! I started shooting “*Memories Of Overdevelopment*” (MOD) in 1980. As my 3 sons were growing up in the mid 80s, a career impulse hit me: Kidlat Tahimik should *grow up with the boys*. That made me set aside the MOD project. Sounds more like an *anti-career* impulse? Actually it was not a decision to “*abandon ship*” — rather to “*winterport*” the film voyage. Until the tots are older.

This US film tour is pointing out to me why MOD ‘*unfinished*’ could drift 3 decades. *Film-plus-performance* became habit (...to fill in the blanks?). Can my slave’s tale of indigenous survival become autonomous cinematically?... without the filmmaker “reincarnating” under the screen in a G-string? Film buffs say the 40-minute MOD showreel is complete. KT is not sure... believing MOD needs the yet-to-be-filmed “*linguistic twist*”: a scene of Magellan’s slave chatting with native islanders — can help viewers grasp that he wasn’t just any multilingual *extra-terrestrial*, landing on a little island in the Pacific. Verily, he was *homo-sapiens* — crying “Home!...*Home at last!*” ...in his native tongue! ... after surviving a successful circumnavigation...

Let’s review how MOD meandered about cosmic detours in the past 1/3 century:

August 1983: The airport assassination of Senator Aquino, Marcos’ rival, precipitates anti-dictator energies. MOD cannot resist the tsunami of Yellow people power. Hence, “*I am Furious Yellow*” filming takes over. (The old title of *Why is Yellow ...*) This lets spend time with his kids at anti-Marcos rallies while shooting them with a Bolex 16mm.

March 1984: Headlines: “*Werner Herzog to do Magellan Film.*” My friends scream: “You shouldn’t have shown Herzog your MOD treatment.” I’m unfazed: KT’s interest is in the *indigenous* slave of the seafarer. A film by Herzog would probably dwell on *obsessiveness of* Magellan (another Kinski-type madman!). I write Werner to offer help if he shoots in the Philippines. Jokingly I offer to play the slave in his film — if he plays Magellan in mine. Werner’s 5-page handwritten letter arrives from Australia: In gist: “Dear Kidlat, don’t worry. That news was diversionary: to divert attention from my Green Ants film with Australian Aborigines. But feel free to use my title “*MagellNash: Der Ende des Endlos Reise*” (MagellNash: End of an Endless Voyage) It’s a great title I think....Indeed. Very Herzog!

October 1992: The 500th anniversary of Columbus’ discovery of the New World catalyzes big-budget celebrations in Spain and USA. This sparks a question: can Portugal or Philippines afford to celebrate big-time Magellan’s feat in 2021? In anticipation, KT successfully gets complimentary airtickets from United Air — to circle the globe with oldest son Kidlat. We plant a ring of trees— in Japan, Hawaii, SFO, Philadelphia, London, Oslo, Munich, Bombay, Hanoi, Uluru (Ayers Rock) and at home Baguio. At each site, we do an



Tahimik being photographed by Ben Rivers. Photograph by Nash.

indigenous ritual to honor the slave—the *spiritual master* of Magellan? Come 2021, even if the world forgets the first man to go round-the-world, at least a dozen trees around the globe will wave their leaves in commemoration.

August 2005: After a stint at Venice Biennale, KT does a stopover in Berkeley. Tom Luddy, Telluride Film Festival director invites me to watch the last films he’s selecting. While viewing Polanski’s “Oliver,” Tom’s new Filipina secretary gets curious about his Filipino visitor. She pulls out an 80’s folder from his cabinet — when Zoetrope Studios (ZS) was distributing *Perfumed Nightmare*. Lo and behold— a hardcopy offering ZS partnership to finish/ distribute the Magellan film. Signed by Francis Coppola, dated July 1983, the letter was posted to me. (No emails in the 80s.) It never arrived at home across the Pacific. Thanks to our Third World postal system, I read the offer of a great filmmaker — 20 years late.

3 cosmic questions: What if the letter did arrive?... What if Zoetrope funding had put strong winds in KT’s sails to finish his film circumnavigation?... Might KT be directing MOD 3 today?...No hard regrets re failed funding...a cosmic necessity?

July 2012: An email from Jeonju Digital Project (JDP) announces that MOD will get Work-In-Progress grant! Yehay! 10 million Korean Won (\$44,000) is a great shot in the arm...The euphoria is short-lived. A festival shake-up in Jeonju replaces old executives and ignores their

selected grantees...Consolation: announcement in fact, spurs a psychic fast-forward. Gusty winds galore! Voyage is again sailing — out of its winterport!

September 2012: KT receives the Fukuoka Prize (a Japanese honor many consider a mini-Nobel Prize for Asians). Certificate is conferred by the Crown Prince. And wow! a cheque for 3 million Yen. (\$33,000) Yehey! After the Korean grant retraction — this Japanese award will come in handy — to film the survival strengths of the slave.

October 2012: A windy duel in NYC. A performance at Anthology Film Archives is rushed, just before NYC subways are suspended for Hurricane Sandy. Playing the awakened typhoon, KT furiously “blows winds” at the audience in his G-string. Within hours, Level-4 gusts of Sandy, level off Manhattan lights to Zero lumens. The next 3 nights of KT screenings are cancelled due to outages.

Questions: Did the weeklong blackout catalyze a cosmic challenge? Did having to walk across Brooklyn Bridge to charge video batteries, whip up dormant energies to jumpstart sleeping galleons out of ground zero? Did the helpless situation (no busses, no trains, no ATMs) say “Go on your own steam!... you can do it!”

A hasty escape from NY (next film stop at Harvard Film Archives). Aboard a funky Chinatown bus, KT is watching a spectacular sunrise over Atlantic waters. A week later, (after a final performance at Pacific Film Archives) KT is on a westward flight crossing a never-ending Pacific. On board Delta 72 KT is filming a never-ending sunset...A reminder of that elusive film horizon yet to be crossed. Yes, before KT is too old to pull focus. A memory looms: 15 years ago, before my octogenarian Magellan actor died, he had humorously warned “Better finish the film before I die!”

During trans-Pacific flight, his words repeat like a refrain— this time, “*before I die*” referring to KT?

November 2012: After the 18-hour flight following the sun across the Pacific, KT is on an 8½ hour bus ride — to shoot an artfest in the rice terraces. ‘Magellan’ enters video frame. Its Kidlat’s 2nd son Kawayan, sporting a bushy Bavarian beard (...genes of my German wife Katrin!) He accidentally walks in front of the bus while I shoot. A sort of serendipitous screen-test.

Hey! Why not a reincarnation of Magellan — to finish this film saga? Why not an *outer* video storyline — to frame the celluloid images shot the early 80s? Let the 1521 characters reunite five centuries later. Video scenes, shot today (in the 3rd millennium) intertwine with celluloid footages, shot in the 1980’s (the 2nd millennium) based on journal entries written in 1521.

Hindsight: It seems MOD did have to winterport — to let it mature with his sons. They

were aged 9, 5 and 2 — in the mid-80s— when they played cameo kiddie-roles in the 16mm footages cranked out. 3 decades later (and 3 technologies later) can the matured guys — aged 37, 33 and 30 — play full-grown seafarers?

February 2013: At a beach a videocam records a chance encounter of 2 reincarnations — Magellan and his slave Enrique — unawares they had shared a cosmic voyage in 1521.

Enter frame: my first grandson, Kalipay. (He is a spitting image of my youngest boy Kabunyan — who when he was 3, played the European bastard son of the slave.) On camera, Kalipay is learning to count in two languages...from his parents born in two islands.... Linguistic tongue-twisters....

And so, the septuagenarian's story sails on....

Happy equinox!

KT