

the geopolitical aesthetic

cinema and space in the world system

fredric jameson

"Often dazzlingly, Jameson sets film in a context that is both interdisciplinary and international." —*East-West Film Journal*

Through a discussion of films from First World directors such as Godard to those of Third World filmmakers such as the Philippines' Kidlat Tahimik, Fredric Jameson examines the contradictory meanings and functions of narrative in film. He poses some essential questions: How does representation function in contemporary film? How does contemporary cinema represent an ever more complex and international social reality? His readings stress how disparate films—for example Sokurov's *Days of Eclipse*, Yang's *Terrorizer*, Godard's *Passion*, and Tahimik's *The Perfumed Nightmare*—all confront similar problems of representation while offering different solutions.

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PERSPECTIVES

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Contents

Preface by Colin MacCabe	ix
Introduction: Beyond Landscape	1
Part One: Totality as Conspiracy	9
Part Two: Circumnavigations	
Chapter 1 On Soviet Magic Realism	87
Chapter 2 Remapping Taipei	114
Chapter 3 High-Tech Collectives in Late Godard	158
Chapter 4 'Art Naïf' and the Admixture of Worlds	186
Index	215

Chapter 4

'Art Naïf' and the Admixture of Worlds

Just as surely as *The Perfumed Nightmare* (1977) is scarcely to be thought of as paradigmatic of Third-World film in general, so also Third-World cinema itself is rarely today defended as a space in which models for alternate cinema are to be sought. Indeed the very term Third World seems to have become an embarrassment in a period in which the realities of the economic have seemed to supplant the possibilities of collective struggle, in which human agency and politics seem to have been dissolved by the global corporate institutions we call late capitalism.¹ The promise of alternate forms in the cinema of that now distant period we call the 60s (but which covered the 70s as well, in chronological retrospect), included the promise of alternate ways of life, alternate collective and communal structures, that were expected to emerge from a variety of struggles against economic, military, and cultural imperialism (and in some cases, those of China, Cuba and Vietnam, for example, this promise overlapped with the Second-World project of the construction of socialism). Meanwhile, for many of us, a degree of fantasy invested the hope, then called Third-Worldism, that precapitalist societies who came to modernization only in relatively recent times would somehow be able to overleap everything crippling for the industrial West in its experience of capitalism and to move into the future with a measure of cultural originality, drawing on the existence of precapitalist and collective social relations for the invention of historically new, non-Western and non-individualistic, postcapitalistic kinds.

The scenario was not a new one, and had already been played through in the nineteenth century. Marx was himself interested in the collective possibilities of the Russian *mir*,² but those who placed their hopes in dialectically uneven development were opposed by the more orthodox Mensheviks, for whom capitalism, and the commodification of labor power, had to be complete before socialism could be considered a practical possibility. Something of the same set of oppositions now seems on the agenda for late capitalism and the new world system, where the autarchy of the socialist countries and the

cultural and social possibilities of Third-World or post-colonial areas have seemed to evaporate under the dreary requirements of modernization and the balanced budget (or the Debt). Third-World 'culture', however, in the narrow sense, has been gratefully absorbed by the international entertainment industry, and has seemed to furnish vibrant but politically acceptable images of social pluralism for the late capitalist big city.

Under these circumstances, clearly, Third-World film – technically modified in its evolution out of a militantly 'imperfect cinema' (García Espinosa) – no longer makes the same kinds of symbolic claims on us as its great predecessors in the formal inventiveness and the political ferment of the 60s, when form was also an extra-aesthetic issue, and what you did to movies and movie-making was also expected to have its impact on changing the world. But these were claims that also asked to be validated in terms of the originality of the form itself; and the effort was thus menaced by two kinds of failure. It could be crushed politically, as universally in the Latin America of the 1970s; or the filmic experiment itself could fail to take, or could be reabsorbed and co-opted by an enlarged and more ecumenical mainstream (or classic Hollywood) cinema. It is therefore a symptomatic moment, and something like the symbolic end of an era, when in 1985 David Bordwell and Janet Staiger publicly review the 'alternate modes of film practice' and conclude that none of them have ultimately fulfilled their promise:

apart from the dominant and long-lived Hollywood style, only a few other general modes of film practice have existed. ... Because of the world-wide imitation of Hollywood's successful mode of production ... oppositional practices have generally not been launched on an industry-wide basis. No absolute, pure alternative to Hollywood exists.²

The argument is richly detailed and persuasive; but as a political or historical symptom, it is of a piece with current market rhetoric in which, also, alternatives to Western economy are pronounced flawed, contradictory, failures or non-existent. Ultimately, what is at stake in both these (properly postmodern) positions is a feeling about daily life or the life world itself: that after all is said and done, this particular life world is somehow *natural*, that efforts to live in other ways are misguided (or occasions for a properly Utopian violence); that our social values demand a 'representational realism' (of the Hollywood or market type) which is a disabused acknowledgment of the perennity of the status quo. (Equivalents to these aesthetic, economic and social positions can meanwhile be found on all the other levels of contemporary social life, such as the psychic and the sexual, or the penal, or the institutional.) The so-called crisis of Marxism turns out

rather to have involved the death of anarchism and its Utopian spirit. It is not revived, of course, by complaints, or by the taking of a thought; the preceding remarks rather attempt to characterize features of the intellectual atmosphere in which we all live today, with a view towards determining our 'current situation'.

That is the situation, indeed, in which we need to invent some new questions to ask of Third-World cinema, and of the Third World generally, as the last surviving social space from which alternatives to corporate capitalist daily life and social relations are to be sought. The fear is, to be sure, that the West will have been so successful in destroying radical political movements in the Third World as to leave only the sterile passions of nationalism and religious fundamentalism (and this is the sense in which, as I've argued elsewhere,⁴ these last may also ironically be counted among the current forms of the post-modern). 'Otherness', meanwhile, is a peculiarly booby-trapped and self-defeating concept; and the slogan of 'difference', while politically impeccable in all the obvious senses, is formalistic and empty of concrete social and historical specification – where it does not, indeed, relax and lend itself to the usual late capitalist celebration of multi-cultural pluralism. (It has, in short, all the ambiguity of an essentially liberal, rather than radical, value.)

My own feeling is that new forms of political art – if not a post-modern political art, then at least a political art within postmodernity – are so far to be felt dimly stirring in the general area of the didactic. By weakening the older forms of aesthetic autonomy, by breaking down the barriers, not merely between high and low culture, but also between literary language and other kinds of discourse, by dissolving the fictional into a whole immense world of representations and image-spectacles which are henceforth as real as any referent, the postmodern situation has, perhaps unwittingly, released new possibilities, and in particular enabled new and different uses of the art object, owing to the heterogeneity of its contents – some 'intrinsic' in the older aestheticizing sense, some 'extrinsic' in ways that go well beyond the older conceptions of collage, montage, ciné vérité or newspaper novel. As an astute observer noted, we are not averse to learning things (facts, recipes, history) out of postmodern books and even out of postmodern novels, in a readerly impurity hitherto taboo and excluded from the practice of the high modernist classics. Reading having been redrawn in contemporary theory, perhaps it is now time to restructure our conception of learning itself. If fantasy is epistemological, as Deleuze has argued in the *Anti-Oedipus*, indeed if narrative is itself a form of cognition, then an obvious next step lies in the systematic harnessing of the energies of those hitherto irrational activities for cognitive purposes. The conception of cognitive mapping I have proposed elsewhere⁵ was intended to include that possibility as well, and to be prescriptive as well as descriptive. The idea

has, at least on my view, the advantage of involving concrete content (imperialism, the world system, subalternity, dependency and hegemony), while necessarily involving a program of formal analysis of a new kind (since it is centrally defined by the dilemma of representation itself). Even as an exclusively retrospective and analytical instrument – critical and historical rather than speculative and productive – 'cognitive mapping' in this sense can be judged on its results and findings. But since it has been affirmed as an activity of individual and collective subjects in general (I have tried to associate it closely with Althusser's classic redefinition of ideology), it is obviously encouraging to find the concept of mapping validated by conscious artistic production, and to come upon this or that new work, which, like a straw in the wind, independently seems to have conceived of the vocation of art itself as that of inventing new geotopical cartographies.

Such is therefore the interest of *The Perfumed Nightmare* (which subsumes its many other varied and rich interests): that cartography and circumnavigation have a special meaning for this film-maker is documented by his most recent project (as far as I know, unfinished at present writing), which takes as its theme the very fact and invention of circumnavigation itself. *Magellan's Slave* (alternately entitled *Memories of Overdevelopment*, a title that as we shall see would hold good equally well for all of Kidlar's films⁶) is reconstructed from the hypothesis of contemporary historians that the slave, whom Magellan purchased in Seville but who was captured in the Indonesian archipelago, seems to have spoken a language not unrelated to

The Perfumed Nightmare





The Perfumed Nightmare

present-day Tagalog; if so, presumably he originated in what are today the Philippines. But since Magellan died on Mactan island in the Archipelago, his slave was the first human being to circumnavigate the globe. Needless to say, he is played by Kidlat himself.

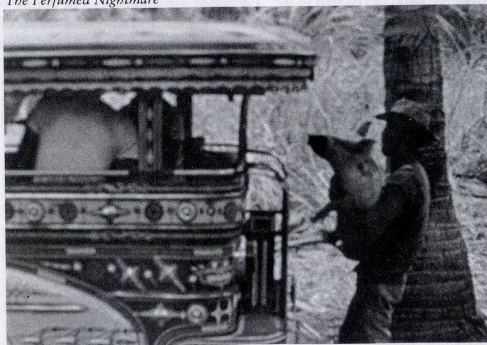
Tahimik is first and foremost a clown: something rare enough, which marks his filmic kinship with Chaplin or with Jacques Tati, and underscores his essential distance from all contemporary filmmaking, whether Third World or Hollywood alike. Philippine cinema has a vibrant tradition of social realism; the late Lino Brocka was only the most well-known of any number of film-makers who can draw on the unique resources of this national situation, in which a quintessential urban agglomeration finds itself internally and externally related to an idyllic tropical countryside in which older forms of village life persist. Their production is then subtended by a long and durable tradition of revolt and guerrilla warfare. Whatever its overt politics and its specific messages, the co-existence of artistic production and political struggle cannot but be stimulating and fertile for the former (and perhaps for the latter as well).

In *The Perfumed Nightmare*, Kidlat plays a jeepney driver – jeepnies being rebuilt and brightly painted jeeps that serve as buses, and in this case as the transport linking the village to the metropolis – who, in his enthusiasm for the US moon landing, has organized a Werner von Braun fan club among the village children. When he eventually wins a trip to Paris to see modernization for himself, he finds older markets being supplanted and destroyed by hideous concrete supermarkets, not without a certain resemblance to atomic power-stations.

At length, he renounces his enthusiasm for Western technology, and returning home, rememorates the martyrdom of his father, who was killed by American soldiers during their occupation of the Philippines. But this account endows a series of episodes and gags (reminiscent of Eisenstein's original conception of the 'montage of attractions') with a misleading semblance of narrative unity.

As for politics, the film, assembled almost a decade before the collapse of the dictatorship, contains only a handful of tactful and discreet allusions to state power, in the shape of police or army uniforms at the outskirts of the image. Indeed, I will want to argue shortly that the relevance of Tahimik's production for the contemporary (or post-contemporary) situation lies precisely in the way in which he eschews the political for the economic, and the thematics of power for that of reification. Nonetheless, there remains in this film a fundamental substitute and 'place-holder' (*tenant-lieu*) for the absent dictator and his regime; something like the ultimate reference itself, which, in a peculiar allegorical reversal, is now called upon to stand in for the signifier and, by taking its place, somehow to represent a phenomenon which was its own effect and secondary expression (indeed, we have argued elsewhere in this book, particularly in Part One, that the force of allegory seems to depend on just such indirection and systematic displacement from one level to another). In the present instance, the allegorical 'substitute' is in fact American imperialism (itself the cause and origin of the Marcos regime), inscribed mythically, as I will show later on, in the person of the murdered

The Perfumed Nightmare



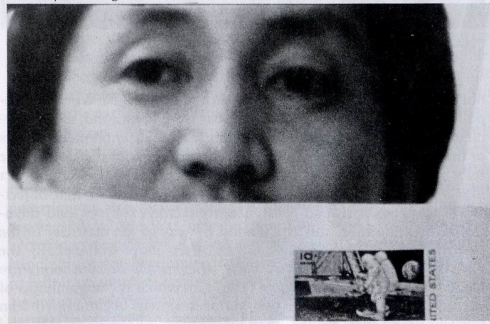
father. But this peculiarly involuted and self-referential allegorical reversal enables the film's crucial move from imperialism as outright political domination and gunboat power to imperialism as cultural domination in a far more contemporary media sense. What is significant about this move is that it makes a link – or 'bridge', to use the film's own symbolic language (see below) – between power and culture without assimilating either to the other in the ontological fashion of First-World theory, which somehow always feels compelled to 'decide' which comes first and where the fundamental or dominant instance is to be located. In Tahimik's episodic rhythms, these two realities remain autonomous, and are simply juxtaposed, side by side or in sequence, without any particular priority being assigned by the form itself or suggested by narrative or causal perspectives.

As for Kidlat's more basic political credentials, they are secured, or so one would have thought, by his second film, *Turumba* (1983), which offers a virtual textbook demonstration of the penetration of capital into a traditional village, and the transformation of collective relations by the market and money relationships. It is a process symbolized by the impact of the 'cash nexus' on the religious ritual designated by the title, and turns on the change visited by production for the market on the musician-performer traditionally responsible for this annual event. It is a festival in which what are separated in modern societies as culture and religion have not yet been dissociated, and whose beauty the tourist-spectators who are this film's Western public can still distantly glimpse and reconstruct from behind the interposed medium of the camera and its travelogue language. Here already, therefore, formal elements that we will find more ambitiously deployed and developed in *The Perfumed Nightmare* can be enumerated: a secondary symbolism marked as such, and the co-optation of co-optation involved in admitting and ostentatiously foregrounding the inauthenticity of the Western spectator and of the travelogue spectacle. Here handicraft is the vehicle for what never changes and is yet changed irrevocably, beyond all recognition. A German tourist-businesswoman likes some of the decorations used in the festival and orders more. Family and then village itself must be enlisted in the gradual mass-production of these items, which eventually destroy the cyclical or ritual time of the village and prevent the organizer from wasting any more of it on the festival which was the source of the objects in question in the first place. Even the crudeness of the final irony – as their reward the manufacturer and his son are given a trip to Europe, to the Munich Olympics of 1972, the Third World visiting the First at the very moment in which the latter is about to be violently impacted by the former – is consistent with Kidlat's aesthetic, in which a gesture toward language and representation (which must therefore designate itself as such) is preferable to the thing seemingly achieved and thereby mistaken for the real.

What remains real in the later film is the historic fact of the destructive effects of a new money economy. It is a fact that more 'modern' societies have once lived, long ago, and have now forgotten, save in the form of empty slogans ('the penetration of capital') that stereotype themselves by living on without experiential meaning. But *Turumba* does not try to reinvent that, or to put us as subjects imaginatively back into a concrete situation of otherness in which we might fleetingly recapture this historically unique event. It does not even make an appeal to historical pathos; nor is its essential gaiety a frivolous or restorative matter either, but the face of an essential indifference, the icy disdain of farce for the fates of individual subjects, the joyous mask that covers a stoic refusal of complicity with the ego's life and death. What *Turumba* does, therefore, is not to commemorate the ancient catastrophe in any Benjaminian or historicist way, nor to represent it with the immediacy of the historical novel, but rather merely to designate its simple existence as a fact: you forgot it, you don't remember what it was like, or even that it happened, but it is still here, somewhere, still happening in one form or another, whether you remember it or not! This peculiar deixis – here is a phenomenon, in the richest philosophic sense of the word; it doesn't matter what you think of it, it is simply here – proves to have unusual pedagogical or didactic potentialities of what we may perhaps term a post-Brechtian kind. And it includes a paradoxical relationship to the public and the spectator by virtue of its very indifference to them.

The incisiveness and simplicity of *Turumba's* demonstration, however, preclude the richness of *The Perfumed Nightmare*, in which we

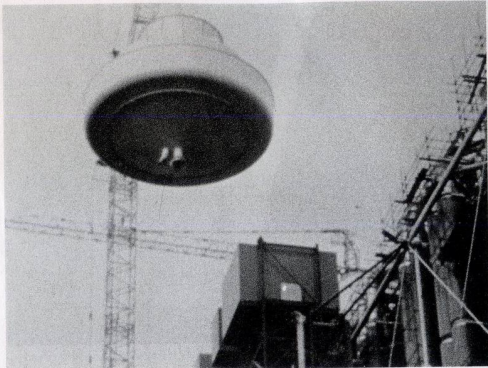
The Perfumed Nightmare





Playtime

not only get to Europe, but wander through the Third-World metropolis itself. Significantly, Kidlat is absent from his second, more completely rural film, something which must have disappointed viewers of the first, in which the epistemological properties of the clown were fully mobilized and put to work in the appropriate environment. As a film of this kind makes clear, the setting in motion of that object-world demands a certain resistance; its tactile exteriors lend themselves to exploration and articulation by way of the elasticity of the clown's body. Chaplin's big city, and even more dramatically the virtually already postmodern Paris, the *société-de-consommation* Gaullist Paris of Tati's *Playtime* (1967), in which the ungainliness of the protagonist elicits, like two surfaces slowly beginning to lean towards each other, the inhuman unloveliness of the glass walls and



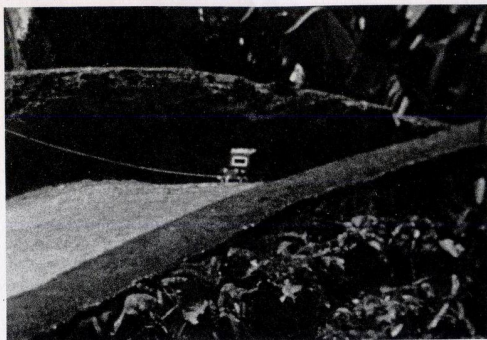
The Perfumed Nightmare

decor – these already begin to suggest the elective affinities between the modern clown and urban modernization itself: Kidlat's machines, and above all his jeepney, but also the modernizing Europe of NATO and the Common Market – urbanizations spreading from Manila out into the villages, but also from the former European nation states out over new multinational customs unions and trade zones. That particular story, one feels like saying, no European or First-World writer or film-maker could tell, because it too fatally resembles the modernizing stories of an earlier and now old-fashioned era, the commodifications clumsily detected by the naturalist libidinal apparatus, the consumers' goods, the peasants, the prostitutes shifted back and forth through the narratives of Dreiser or Zola. Polls, sociological treatises, documentaries and economic forecasts are the genre in which such materials are now transmitted. Elegant representationns of the more expensive television kind would fatally transform such *examples* into the expectation of a thesis whose second shoe waits to drop, thereby unsettling an already uncomfortable viewing public. Only a mode of representation which is not uncomfortable with clumsiness could accommodate such social developments. Kidlat's home-made movies handle them very well indeed, as a bonus or by-product allowing us to reflect on our own generic discomfort much as Brecht thought his audience should spend some time mulling over the meaning of the actions represented in the play.



The Perfumed Nightmare

The same is true for the conceptual or philosophical content of this work, which one could imagine 'resolved' in very different ways from this, according to the respective aesthetic. 'Mediation', for example, is here symbolically designated by the picture of a bridge, and specifically of the little hump-backed stone bridges of the village, over which real and toy vehicles laboriously pass. As a 'concept', it has something to do with the relationship between cultural stages (Third and First Worlds); between the 'levels' of social life itself, not excluding the episodic heterogeneity of this film, which passes abruptly from technology to work, art to politics, anthropology to gentrification without smoothing over the traces or making the 'transitions' (the bridges) any less bumpy; between the past and the future, as well, and between confinement and freedom. In a representational work, all these awkward transitions would have to be concealed by a plausibly constructed plot along with mesmerizingly naturalized camerawork. In Eisenstein, their intersections, rebaptized montage in all of its senses, would be transformed, by violence and by fiat, into powerful slogans and statements, concrete relationships prestidigitated into 'dialectical' models. In Godard, meanwhile, who will here and throughout serve as the most enlightening First-World co-ordinate for rethinking Kidlat, the specific mediation would be projected onto the screen as an open problem – image and text side by side and incommensurable, unresolvable, but also irrepressible, and the pretext for nagging returns to antinomies which, repeated often enough, seem to turn into 'themes' of an old-fashioned literary type.



The Perfumed Nightmare

But Tahimik's 'bridges' also look like themes in the more old-fashioned sense of symbols (rather than the theoretical motifs that stud Godard's essay-films). The very archaic nature of these figures is in fact what saves them, for here, as in naïf art generally, the gap between the image and the intended meaning lies open as innocently as in a child's or a schizophrenic drawing. This kind of symbol is therefore so pre-representational as to rejoin all of the most post-modern and poststructural strictures on the arbitrariness of the sign and the essentially allegorical nature of the symbol, the ineradicable gap between figuration and meaning, the impossibility of achieved representation, the generation of more and more text out of the unsynchronizable synecopation between the signifier and its signified. Here then the picture postcard of the bridge leads us further on into sheer space: the space of the village, and then the space of the bridge or transport between the village and Manila – figured by the jeepney that conveys passengers back and forth. At length, in a larger opening, this is not merely the bridge between the earth and the moon (along with the Werner von Braun fan clubs that celebrate it), but that more tangible bridge which the protagonist will at length cross leading from Asia to Europe, from Third World to First and back, from Manila to Paris (and from Paris to the Rhine), and from a Philippino present to a traditional Parisian past itself in the process of being obliterated by its own Common Market future. All of these spaces are then in constant decomposition and modernization, including each other heterogeneously, in such a way that narrative progression

becomes unthinkable, except as a bus ride, and we learn to substitute for it the discontinuous series of spatial exhibits that might be offered by a collection of snapshots, or by the old variety show implicit in the form of the clown's gags – that vaudeville 'montage of attractions' from which, as I've already mentioned, Eisenstein's own theory and practice ultimately derived in its own very different and distinctive way. There is, I think, a fable buried in this particular collection of episodes: it is the movement of disillusion that leads from the first enthusiasm for Western technologies – the conquest of the moon, the fan clubs – to their ultimate renunciation, after the experience of the real First World itself. But the meaning of this renunciation is ambiguous, as I will argue in a moment.

Yet the heterogeneous form of the sequence is itself as different from that celebrated by First-World radical cinema as Latin American magic realism is from its European surrealist predecessor: and for the same reason, namely, that here heterogeneity is inscribed ahead of time in the very content itself. In First-World cinema (in Godard, for instance) it was programmed to happen to the form, not merely by way of transformation of realities into their own representations, so that we are no longer looking at a Bazinian person but rather at a photograph or image of that person; but also very much by way of that incommensurability between the different representations or texts which the West always seems to live in terms of this or that crisis of relativism. But Western relativisms – however internally jarring and contradictory – have always seemed to take place within some essential class homogeneity: the most dramatic eruptions of otherness – as in race or gender – always ultimately seeming to fold back into conflicts on the inside of a sphere whose true other or exterior eluded representation altogether. And that virtually by definition, since in the very moment in which a thought or impulse from that unrepresentable Outside enters the field of thought or discourse, it will already have been represented, and henceforth belonging to 'us', can no longer be truly other or noumenal.

It is a dilemma that all consequent First-World artists must face in their own unique and distinctive ways, but which Godard's Maoism can serve at least to dramatize in a consequent manner, which has the advantage of including the formal plane within itself. For his obsession with the opposition between images and words is surely itself already, if not a replay, then at least a pre-play of the dialectic of inside and outside that Maoism will at least for a time be invoked to resolve. 'Juste une image': the famous reversal, accompanied by an oddly defensive insistence on the unlikely proposition that images cannot lie, suggests at the very least a multiple strategy, in which a nostalgia for a solid visual world cleansed of the ambiguities of language can co-exist with the possibility of interrupting the visual and its illusions with multiple languages external to it that ceaselessly

problematises its messages and symbolically re-enact an outside threatening at every point to penetrate the security of the visual monad.

Godard's 'method' is then to stage his heterogeneities statically – within the image, rather than, as in Kidlat, between the narrative segments – in such a way as to pry the auditory image away from the iconic ones. This is done, not in order to reveal some more 'natural' reality behind those formal planes, which is the strategy of eighteenth-century bourgeois revolution; nor even to transform their incommensurability into a new kind of history lesson, as in Brecht; but rather in order to exacerbate a kind of negative dialectic, an intensified and frustrated consciousness of the simulacra within which we find ourselves immobilized and bewitched. 'Maoism' cannot be the same kind of answer to this dilemma, nor can it generate the same kind of dialectical lesson, as the Great Method of Mei-ti which enables the provisional pause, the provisional ending, for Brecht's didactic plays. The moment Maoism appears as such in Godard (in *La Chinoise* [1967]) it is immediately degraded to the status of a new kind of image in its own right and releases a new flood of degenerate iconographies. As for the larger global horizon it once promised and designated within the First World, this bourgeoisie reverting to barbarism and cannibalism scarcely has the leisure to hear its distant accents, save in those moments in which an inner Third World appears in flesh and blood in the person of migrant workers – as with the famous African garbage collectors of *Weekend*, who recite Lenin and Fanon to the bemused white middle-class refugees from a world on its way to Apocalypse.

Kidlat's grotesque Europeans are apparently all Filipinos in disguise, acting out American imperialists or German businesswomen with comic gusto: something surely more cathartic for them than for Godard's Africans or Palestinians. For the fundamental lesson of this comparison must surely lie in the radical dissymmetry between these two situations, which are not mere inversions of one another. What the First World thinks and dreams about the Third can have nothing whatsoever in common, formally or epistemologically, with what the Third World has to know every day about the First. Subalternity carries the possibility of knowledge with it, domination that of forgetfulness and repression – but knowledge is not just the opposite of forgetfulness, nor is domination the opposite of oppression.

In the same way, the village, as it extends outwards to include Manila, and then Paris and Europe itself, is a very different kind of space from that – exactly coterminous and identically superimposable on the same map – which stretches out from Paris and Europe to envelop the Philippines, Manila and ultimately the village itself. Alejo Carpentier implied as much in his fundamental definition of the 'real maravilloso' (magic realism) years ago, when he observed that sur-

realism expressed a First-World subjective craving for heterogeneity and de-reification, whereas that superficially similar trend in Latin American literature called magic realism sprang from the objective fact of uneven development in the post-colonial object-world itself. In the latter, the co-existence of layers of social time, from the most modernized to the most ancient peasant customs and thought modes, all persist side by side within the Latin American present, their chaotic juxtaposition at once detectable on the recording surfaces, where uncommodified experience spills out more richly than the twice commodified data of a more completely standardized and uniform late capitalist reality – which has already been processed in daily life before being processed a second time by the media that control its representations.

Meanwhile, both these kinds of social reality have their absent other in what it may be abusive to name with the same word, that is, 'the body,' since even this pole of the organization of experience is radically different in the two economies and the two cultures. In both, to be sure, the body is what guarantees individual experience as its most apparently concrete form, a ballast of the social imaginary, that ultimate individuality that nails in place the layers of the general and the abstract, the universal or the collective. But in the West, the corporate impoverishment of experience determines a kind of frenzy and desperation in which the promises of the last bodily layer are sought after with a well-nigh pathological single-mindedness. It is

The Perfumed Nightmare



The Perfumed Nightmare

what can be called the reduction to the body and observed in its more symptomatic forms in pornography and violence porn, provided these are not greeted with a simple-minded moralizing but rather acknowledged historically as deeper truths of our social experience, and as primordial characteristic of our socially specific relationship to Being. Godard's pointless explosions of violence and scandal – from the dentings and bashings of cars all the way to the cannibalism of *Weekend*, and in the seemingly gratuitous incidence of prostitution throughout, which, in the fashion of Baudelaire, Simmel and Karl Kraus, he systematically links up with art, acting and exhibitionism, and the infinite thirst for financial backers – these attempt, if not to master, then at least to inscribe this function of the bodily substratum.

Whether or not Third-World culture is in general more reticent about bodily experience – perhaps it would be better to say that it does not seem to put the same premium on the consumption of simulacra of the corporeal and the physiological – it is certain that *The Perfumed Nightmare*, having concentrated this kind of libidinal investment in the figure of the clown himself, is not concerned in the same obsessive way with surfaces and textures, and with the microrepresentation of the pores of being. It is therefore all the more significant to locate the body's inscription here in a very different place, namely, that of ritual. How else indeed to account for the gratuitous and scandalous irruption of the two shocking episodes of circumcision and of childbirth

that oddly and arbitrarily punctuate this otherwise humorous text with all the jarring incoherence of Stendhal's pistol shots at a concert? But in Stendhal (and in the very period of Napoleon's dictum that politics is destiny) those were the incursions of the political into the realm of the social and of what was apparently private life: these mark a similar intersection, where the collective, however, invests the great biological rhythms as they cut across individual lives.

It does not, indeed, seem to be an accident that what is widely considered to be the first African novel in French, the *Batouala* of the Caribbean writer René Maran, which won the Prix Goncourt in 1921, also turns centrally on a gruesome ritual of circumcision. Clearly, Kidlat Tahimik cannot have the same justification of a kind of realism and the representation of social customs still extant, nor can his fantasy circumcision even be thought to reflect elements of the style of some indigenous culture on the point of eclipse. This non-existential bodily violence may be thought to be something like the mask both works turn with a certain ironic *ressentiment* towards the voyeuristic public of the First World, of the Prix Goncourt or of the film festivals, as it avidly receives these presumably authentic specimens of geotopic otherness.

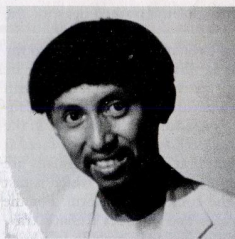
That is a reading which is not inconsistent with another one, however: namely, the sense that in otherness of this kind – in the styles that conjure up ethnicity, that nourish stereotypes and quicken the various racisms fully as much as the various celebrations of collective identity – it is somehow the fantasy of religious otherness that is the ultimately determining instance. Religion on this view is grasped as little more than some central point of otherness in the collective relations – the mirages and optical illusions – between the various groups. Religion then, here deeper than the individual body itself, is what is unclean in the other *ethnie*; but as a fantasmatic property or essence it can only be grasped by way of their outlandish practices and rituals. At some deepest unconscious level then, all foreign cultures are somehow fantasized as so many religions, as specific types of abomination and superstition. Yet by the same token, when I come to attempt to reaffirm my own imaginary cultural identity, only the rags and trappings of 'religion' are available, trappings which it takes a certain fanaticism to talk myself into for any extended period of time.

These features of *The Perfumed Nightmare* are, to be sure, divested of their more alarming implications by the episodic structure of the narrative. But they nonetheless ultimately connect, however weakly, with that interpretive temptation of a kind of cultural nationalism which we will evaluate in conclusion. Otherwise, these two gratuitous episodes of bodily pain merely serve to anchor or ground the sequence of gags, which, as in all classical farce, since it ultimately concerns the body itself, must insist in passing on the thump of the

fall, the stab of the gouty toe, the biting of the trained fleas, or the smarming of the paddle.

It is time, therefore, to look more closely at the form itself and the contents that determine it: something that can initially best be approached negatively. For all generic law is as much concerned with warding off the wrong or inappropriate reactions, questions, readings, and receptive attitudes, as it is to produce the 'right' ones. In the present instance, it seems clear that *The Perfumed Nightmare* faces at least one fundamental generic dilemma: that is, how its segments are to be prevented from degenerating into that travelogue which is just as surely its other generic pole and the content of its form. For the film is our travelogue on the Philippines and includes Kidlat's travelogue on Europe; and in order for the images not simply to fold back into their own stereotypes, and for them to affirm themselves as realities, a gap must be kept open between the contents and what displays them. This last must ceaselessly be designated as an arbitrary form in its own right, must point to itself, and the fact of the travelogue as form must itself become part of the film's content, included in the subject-matter.

Meanwhile, if the decline into travelogue menaces this work from one end, its disintegration into outright farce and comic gags await it at the other. The persona of the clown, and the concomitant vaudeville structure of discontinuous numbers, motivate the willed and necessarily episodic structure of the film, but this motivation must remain weak. Tati's project (in *Playtime*) can accommodate an infinite series of humorous situations; but here the laughter must somehow remain within the film, as is the case with the hilarity of the members of the Werner von Braun fan club, village children whom the Kidlat character has assembled around himself as a supporting cast and to justify his application in the international contest for the best slogan describing the moon shot. The narcissistic sentimentalism of the Kidlat persona is clearly one of the ways in which this formal tension is defused: we are free to attribute our amusement to the 'objective situation' or to the absurdity of its protagonist indifferently. Yet another solution is also present in the regrouping of the travelogue itself into something like a family photo, with our conviction that the shots of the village and the villagers will be shown to the latter for their analysis and appreciation, and received according to the norms of naive realism. Thus Kidlat's sheepish passport photo is remodelled by the village children in the form of a smiling dog. Meanwhile, the shots of the 'West' will also presumably be rescreened in the village, where Kidlat's presence in that exotic scenery can be presumed to have been greeted by equally appreciative hoots. The film, in other words, includes its spectator (or narratee) within itself. Palpably made for a First-World (or film festival) public, it also requires its First-World audience to look over the shoulder of a Third-



The Perfumed Nightmare



World public at the same time, or through their 'implied' point of view, without any irony in the Western sense. Travelogue is here rescued and transformed, not by metamorphosis into the great Western spatial image (as, say, in Antonioni's notorious documentary on China), but rather by regression to some first and more primal level of the first forms of photography, the family snapshot or the home movie, the wonderment of sheer reproduction and recognition. The First-World/Third-World dialectic is thereby inscribed within the film, in its very form and the structure of its viewing; at the same time that Kidlat's aesthetic rejoins a whole range of Western avant-garde or experimental projects in which the home movie, the non-professional, non-institutional use of the camera, symbolically becomes the Utopian escape from commercial reification.

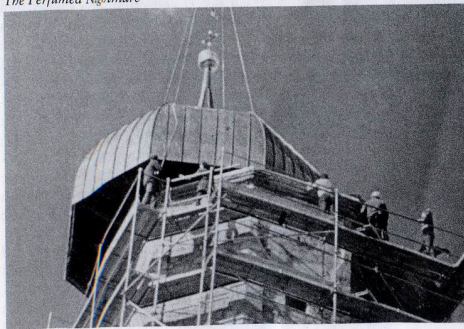
The difference is, as I began to suggest above, that this particular film has a message and seeks to transmit an ideological lesson of a type embarrassing if not inconceivable for First-World (realistic) filmmakers. Just as *Turumba* sets out to illustrate the ravages of a money economy, so also *The Perfumed Nightmare* may be read as a virtual textbook illustration of the classical account: 'constant revolutioning of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones ... all that is solid melts into air' (Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*).

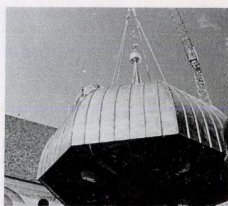
What is paradoxical about the illustration – and what distinguishes the procedure here from the aesthetic of Kidlat's second, more openly didactic film – is that the proposition is demonstrated on the First World rather than on the Third. The lesson is learned in Paris rather than in Manila, and the political or pedagogical pathos that might have been expected to be aroused in the service of a properly postcolonial militancy is here displaced and redirected back

to the source, and exercised on behalf of the very metropolis that under other circumstances would have been denounced as the subject of the imperial domination and the agent of commodification and of the destruction of the old ways. What Kidlat observes and dwells on is rather the destruction of the older *quartiers* of Paris itself, the sweeping away of a traditional petty bourgeoisie of small shops and shopkeepers by the new chains of supermarkets, the bureaucratic control of space itself, the late capitalist onslaught on the classical capitalist city, something like the dialectical self-destruction of the First World and its own internal social relations. Meanwhile, across the Rhine, the decline in handicraft is also dramatically and spatially registered, in the episode of the setting in place of the last hand-crafted *Zwiebelturn*, distinctive emblem of a specifically German culture which is also in the process of homogenization and standardization.

This paradoxical redirection, this substitution of referents, does not merely recall attempts of the New Criticism to characterize what is unique and specific to poetic language and its effects in paradox itself and in reversals of all kinds. It also makes one think of what must be among the very first texts in this genre, in which, in 1859, the passing of the classical city and its mutilation by technology, modernization and the new, are lamented – *The Swan* of Baudelaire, in which the destructive effects on Paris of that earlier state of modernization symbolized by the name of Haussmann are unexpectedly evoked by way of the memory of a classical reading (Virgil) and the hopeless situations of Third-World exiles and prisoners: by way, that is to say,

The Perfumed Nightmare





The Perfumed Nightmare

of the deep past and the violence of European domination (itself then reinscribed, but classically, 'aesthetically', within the Virgilian text); as though the intersection of both these co-ordinates were necessary in order to allegorize the fate of a few old buildings and to project the fate of the city itself as an emblematic destiny.

Kidlat's travelogues shake similar perceptions free by way of the transformation of distant superhuman fantasies of the space program, transmitted by satellite into the village, into the ugly poured-concrete masses of the new supermarkets that fall into traditional *arrondissements* like meteorites from the future. Even so, the message is by no means as simple as the feeling, and it is to imprint the latter with the former that, in Baudelaire fully as much as in *The Perfumed Nightmare*, the indirections and substitutions already

mentioned have been deployed: for the perception must be prevented from implying or transmitting any simple denunciation of modernization as such. The lesson's classical text is itself here the model, and conveys the additional lesson that the dialectic necessarily posits mixed feelings. For Marx, the ceaseless destruction of the old by the new is as positive as it is negative; the archaic needed to be given a shove (as Nietzsche put it), everything that is tragic about its disappearance is also to be welcomed. I'm tempted to say that in Baudelaire what is positive about the destruction of Paris is the excuse it offers for the deployment of that new content called *spleen* and the occasion it provides for the new (modernist) poetic and formal production the latter now demands. It is therefore language that is here the beneficiary, *its* modernization is the productive face of the wanton bureaucratic efficiency of Haussmann's baleful embellishment of the city.

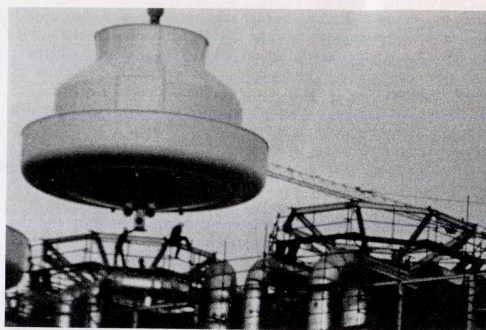
The Perfumed Nightmare, however, would seem to be threatened with a different set of impossible alternatives. For in a Third World classically fixated on the dualism between the Old and the New, between tradition and Westernization, culture and science, religion and secularization, the critique of modernization risks tipping the

scales, in a situation in which neither alternative can really be satisfactory. It is an ideological message that is ready to transmit itself, simply by the removal or suspension of its opposite. Thus, something like cultural nationalism is implicitly revealed when the option of advanced technology is taken away, whether or not the author or film-maker has thought it through and really means to endorse this reversal and this essentially political position. Kidlat's film, however, goes further than this, for its concluding sections really do seem to conjure up a whole discursive world of visionary legend that fleshes out and gives content to the cultural-nationalist alternative, which despite the images of the village and the countryside had not yet fully taken shape. But this is also the moment in which politics, and the historical fact of imperialism, enter the picture far more vividly, and in which the American conquest and the American occupation, the murder of the father, inscribe power and history openly, as themes, and with none of the tactful indirections of the sparse allusions to the internal political situation.

Yet it is a politics conjoined with another kind of raw material which had not yet been pressed into service in the film's series of vaudeville numbers: that is, myth itself, in the form of the great wind or typhoon which is set in place at the film's climax, and which is called upon to symbolize the will to revolt, the archaic or natural power of the great Third-World revolutions. It is what the New Critics would have called an 'unearned' ending, little enough in this

The Perfumed Nightmare





The Perfumed Nightmare

film justifying the banner of revolt raised in its concluding moments. On the other hand, the New Critics worked with organic conceptions of the work of art and of the concrete universal; their conception of a full motivation is unseasonable here, in a form which is deliberately disjointed and heterogeneous. It is precisely that heterogeneity which also frees this unearned ending, and allows the inscription of the force of revolt, but only as a specific figure in this particular film, and not as any generalizable political or cultural program that can be transferred elsewhere. The beauty of the resolution on this particular level – the way in which the image of a butterfly that enfolds the sun in its wings unites the gentleness of the Kidlat persona with the violence of revolutionary rage itself – is marked as a fragile figure by the very nature of its content. The image itself, which we here manhandle with clumsy fingers, has all the brittle delicacy of the butterfly's wings, no matter what may be the ultimate destiny of this figure – from tattoo to historical force of nature. This is perhaps to say that the cultural-nationalist alternative – a politics which draws on indigenous cultural traditions in order to summon the force and will to dislodge the invader – is here inscribed as an impulse rather than a program, as an aesthetics of revolt rather than its concrete politics. It is, as in the Sartrean concept of derealization, a message transmitted by the quality of the image, rather than its structural implications. Above all, it is a message transmitted by the unreal or derealized quality of the image, which consists in very precisely that unreality and that provisional aestheticism.

But that message has also been transmitted outside the image itself,



The Perfumed Nightmare

by the very unevenness of its figural context. The great typhoon, the butterfly, must in fact compete with the 'bridge', with the jeepnies, with the *Zwiebelturm* and the supermarket, the airplane and the man in the moon, a competition in which it proves to have a kind of resilience which is not merely aestheticist or *fin-de-siècle*. By the same token, the interpretation in terms of cultural nationalism must itself compete with other readings, which I have withheld until now. For First-World modernization and advanced technology is not in fact, in *The Perfumed Nightmare*, simply one term in a dualism or binary opposition: a third term comes to join those familiar ones of the West and of mythic traditional or native culture.

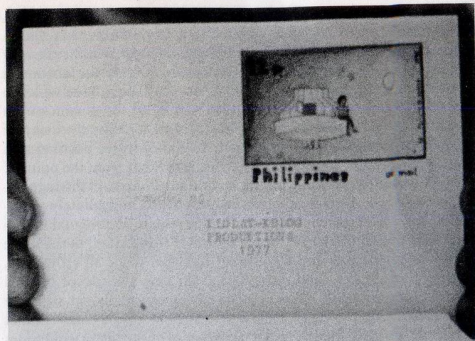
This third term is the moment of industrial production within an otherwise agricultural context (for even the Parisians in this film sell agricultural produce); nor does it turn on the nostalgic essentialization of the vanishing moment of artisanal labor and craft, as we see it for one last time in the final *Zwiebelturm*. Rather, it consists in the building, the unbuilding, the rebuilding, of the jeepnies – bricolage if there ever was, a scavenging for spare parts and home-made ad hoc solutions – the constant re-functioning (Brecht's *Unfunktionierung*) of the new into the old, and the old into the new, the reconstruction of military machinery into painted traditional artifacts, and the dismemberment of those artifacts for the handicraft assemblage of the jeepnies. This is not merely the auto-referentiality of the *naïf* film itself, whose aesthetic consists precisely in this unremitting collection of miscellaneous footage that you put together at your pleasure. It also in and of itself immediately blasts apart the sterile opposition



The Perfumed Nightmare

between the old and the new, the traditional and the Western, and allows its former components themselves to be cannibalized and conceptually resoldered. Unlike the 'natural' or mythic appearances of traditional agricultural society, but equally unlike the disembodied machinic forces of late capitalist high technology, which seem, at the other end of time, equally innocent of any human agency or individual or collective praxis, the jeepney factory is a space of human labor which does not know the structural oppression of the assembly line or Taylorization, which is permanently provisional, thereby liberating its subjects from the tyrannies of form and of the pre-programmed. In it aesthetics and production are again at one, and painting the product is an integral part of its manufacture. Nor finally is this space in any bourgeois sense humanist or a golden mean, since spiritual or material proprietorship is excluded, and inventiveness has taken the place of genius, collective co-operation the place of managerial or demiurgic dictatorship.

It is, indeed, instructive to juxtapose this particular factory space, tossed in as yet another vaudeville number or travelogue segment, with earlier places of production in this book. The optical fitting-room and business convention of *Videodrome* were clearly outposts of distribution, while Pakula's newspaper office – notwithstanding Joyce's Cave of the Winds – was less plausible as a workplace than those journeys into the bowels of the infrastructure we were able to glimpse in *Three Days of the Condor* or in *The Conversation*. But Hitchcock's Seagram Building is yet another place of management



The Perfumed Nightmare

rather than of production, one we see from the outside at that, and from the point of view of an advertising agency executive. Only the Europeans seem willing to make their way back onto the shop floor: but Sokurov's documentary sequence (on 'the building trades' in Central Asia) is spliced into his fiction film as though to make the point about the vanity of all human labor and the impossibility for Soviet people to attain the reliable and efficiently planned and produced object-world of the West. Appropriately enough, then, Godard's Swiss factory seems far more high tech, but also to betray a kind of Western or First-World mesmerization with human interactions and social relations exclusively (how do you show labor, Godard's characters ask; can you make a film about work – isn't it something like pornography?) This is the context in which Kidlat's jeepnies mark the place of a properly Third-World way with production which is neither the ceaseless destruction and replacement of new and larger industrial units (together with their waste by-products and their garbage), nor a doomed and nostalgic retrenchment in traditional agriculture; but a kind of Brechtian delight with the bad new things that anybody can hammer together for their pleasure and utility if they have a mind to. Kidlat's film is then itself just such another jeepney, an omnibus and omnipurpose object that ferries its way back and forth between First and Third Worlds with dignified hilarity.

It is also an excellent provisional ending to this selective anthology of movies from the current world system. It is well to be able to take as one's text and for one's lesson a work so inimitable, for it is

unlikely that *The Perfumed Nightmare* will mislead by serving as an immutable model of anything, just as it is improbable that Kidlat should found a school or movement. What is instructive for the new political culture to come is the way in which here the economic dimension has come to take precedence over a political one which is not left out or repressed, certainly, but which (in the person of the father and the butterfly, and the doomed revolt against the army of occupation) is for the moment assigned a subordinate position and role. In *The Political Unconscious*,⁷ I suggested that from the point of view of content or raw material we have some interest in distinguishing between three distinct categories or levels: the immediately political, in the sense of the contingencies and reversals of punctual events themselves; the conjunctural, or the realm of social class, in the sense of the larger collective and ideological forces at work all around us, coming to articulation and retreating again into a world of blurred contours and mystified obfuscation, only occasionally, in supreme moments, finding the stark definition of the outright class conflict itself; the economic, finally, in the larger sense of the history of modes of production, the great patterning systems that imprint the daily lives of producing and consuming subjects, forming their habits and their psyches in the process, and only occasionally entering into crisis as they are challenged with forms of the new, with new collective structures and new human relations (if not indeed with the sometimes equally problematizing recurrence and revival of much more ancient ones). Each of these three dimensions – which always co-exist – has its own logic, so that in politics as much as in art it is advisable to sort them out for openers, it being understood that you may well want to recombine them (explosively or architectonically) later on.

One's sense, in the present conjuncture, sometimes called the onset of postmodernity or late capitalism, is that our most urgent task will be tirelessly to denounce the economic forms that have come for the moment to reign supreme and unchallenged. This is to say, for example, that those doctrines of reification and commodification which played a secondary role in the traditional or classical Marxian heritage, are now likely to come into their own and become the dominant instruments of analysis and struggle. In other words, a cultural politics, a politics of daily life, which emerged in earlier decades but as something of an adjunct and a poor relative, a supplement, to 'politics' itself, must now – at least in the First World – be the primary space of struggle. This is indeed precisely what Kidlat's film teaches us: that the other levels must be inscribed – from the sheerly eventful or punctual (as in the Munich Olympics) to the great class warfare of the national liberation struggle – but that today as never before we must focus on a reification and a commodification that have become so universalized as to seem well-nigh natural and organic entities and forms. We must retain the visibility of these

artificial entities, and attempt, through a long night of universal domination, to maintain a flickering self-consciousness of their omnipresence; inscribing them tirelessly on the form of the work as Kafka's lieutenant had his sentence carved over and over again on his own back (or Kidlat's character, his tattoo), in hopes that this second nature can again, by dint of concentration, reveal itself as historical and as the result of human actions, and thereby once again 'lead us to take pleasure in the possibility of change in all things'.⁸

Notes

1. I take it that the slogan 'Third Cinema' is an attempt to square this circle and to retain the formal strengths of Third-World political cinema in a period in which its content has necessarily been modified beyond recognition. See on this the excellent collection edited by Jim Pines and Paul Willemen, *Questions of Third Cinema* (BFI, 1989).
2. See Teodor Shanin (ed.), *Late Marx and the Russian Road* (New York: Monthly Review, 1983), in particular the drafts of Marx's letter to Vera Zasulich and Haruli Wada's illuminating commentary. Marx's discussion, on forms of a transition from communism to capitalism in Russia, is unexpectedly suggestive for the present conjuncture as well.
3. David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 381–5. But see also the articles by Teshome Gabriel (in *Questions*) for an attempt to redefine just such an alternative.
4. See my *Postmodernism, Or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), pp. 386–91.
5. *Postmodernism*, pp. 50–4, and 409–17.
6. Kidlat exhibited some rushes from the project at the 'Challenge of Third World culture', a conference held in September 1986, at Duke University and organized by Charles Berquist, Ariel Dorfman and Masao Miyoshi. See also the interview with Kidlat by Lorin Mirella, in *Polygraph* 1 (1987), pp. 57–66 (including a valuable article by Mirella on *The Perfumed Nightmare*). Tahimik has apparently completed two other films since this conference: *Yan-ki and I am Furious, Yellow*, which I have not been able to see. The distinguished Filipino film critic, Isagani R. Cruz, was able to find only two brief references to Kidlat (as an 'experimental' film-maker) in recent Filipino film criticism, which seems to be mainly oriented around the analysis of national commercial production. But if Tahimik remains unknown to the general public in the Philippines, he is admired by younger intellectuals 'as a model of what can be done alone and without national recognition' (Cruz, in private correspondence).
7. Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 75–100.
8. Bertolt Brecht, *A Short Organon for the Theater*, in John Willet (ed.), *Brecht on Theater* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), p. 202.