

# “You’re so different, but you’re exactly alike.”

## Interview with Katrin de Guia

Tobias Hering and Tilman Baumgärtel

Katrin de Guia, Kidlat Tahimik’s German-born wife, has worked on many of the films of her husband. She created the rich, detailed costumes for *Memories of Overdevelopment* and a number of other works. In *Perfumed Nightmare*, *Memories of Overdevelopment*, *Why is Yellow the Middle Colour of the Rainbow?*, *Balikbayan No. 1* and in some of his short films, she appears in front of the camera as well. Since her influence on the works of Kidlat Tahimik seems to be significant, we wanted to discuss her role in the production of his films.

But Katrin de Guia is also an artist and writer in her own right. She graduated from the Art Academy in Munich, and worked as a stain-glass artist. She obtained a PhD from the University of the Philippines with a thesis on the psychology of Philippines, that was inspired by the work of Virgilio Enriquez, a psychology professor at the University of the Philippines and the founder of Pambansang Samahan sa Sikolohiyang Pilipino (National Association for Sikolohiyang Pilipino, Inc.), that he established in 1975 to study the particular psychological make-up of the Filipinos.

According to Enriquez (1992), the concept of *Kapwa*—the term means both “self” as well as “the other” in Filipino—is the core construct of Filipino Psychology that sets it apart from Western concepts of the self and of the personality of the individual. Katrin De Guia drew on these ideas in her own book that is entitled *Kapwa*. In our interview she shared insights into the findings of her PhD thesis as well as into the production process of Kidlat Tahimik’s films.

**Tobias Hering and Tilman Baumgärtel (TH/TB):** Your name appears in the credits in many of Kidlat Tahimik's films. In this interview, we want to clarify your contribution to the production of the individual films. Did you have a role in producing *Perfumed Nightmare*?

**Katrin de Guia (KdG):** Not directly in the production. But I was his interlocutor during the film's development. The protagonist in *Perfumed Nightmare*, for example, was originally supposed to freeze to death under the car. I talked Kidlat out of doing that and said: "It would be a pity to let a film end so bleakly." I had a supportive role. Naturally, one can't see this directly on screen. It is just as it was with Kurosawa, who also had a life partner, who did half of his work, but she is never mentioned in any way. Every creative process is actually a confrontation. I just happened to be the person who was constantly present. I and Charlie Fugunt, who contributed enormously as the film's editor.

**TH/TB:** Kidlat Tahimik hadn't shot a film before *Perfumed Nightmare* and also had no training in this field, and yet he wanted to make this ambitious, feature-length film with such an unusual, fanciful scenario. Did you ever have any doubts whether he was up to this task?

**KdG:** Of course, I had some. My brother was a filmmaker as well. So I already had preconceived expectations: One doesn't work for more than half a year on that kind of thing. And if it doesn't work out, then one just ditches it and starts all over again. My German friends and relatives were constantly asking: "Has he lost the plot? Is he still at it? Two years have already passed." I also spoke out about this at home. But he was simply different. Already as we met for the first time, I intuitively recognized that he marched to his own beat. I do not know how, but he ticked differently, and it isn't that he ticked incorrectly. This also fed into my desire to delve deeper into Philippine psychology and culture at a later stage.

**TH/TB:** Could you describe your living conditions in Munich while *Perfumed Nightmare* was being made?

**KdG:** We lived on social welfare assistance. He proposed to me when I was pregnant. I asked myself: A dropout from the Philippines,

whom nobody knows and who is a head shorter than me—what’s all this about? Actually, I never wanted to marry. I didn’t want any children either. Nowadays nobody believes me any longer, for I have three children. The children came easily, by chance.

At first we lived with friends in the countryside. It was still relatively easy there. We just did everything ourselves and minded the children together. There were three young couples with small children. The filmmakers, who brought us there, all moved out over time. They didn’t want to have to deal with screaming children and such. So, then we were just the families. It was pretty good for half a year, really nice. That was in Oberlappach close to Maisach. I didn’t like this filmmaker community in Arget. It was too wild there. They were taking drugs. Some interesting people lived there, but the price was too high. Nowadays people say, “Kidlat Tahimik lived in a commune and later met his wife there.” Actually we were all female students in a women’s house and didn’t really participate in this nightly and daily drama, and were actually quite independent. What happened was that a woman heard about this house through this commune, and we then moved in there. It was relatively close to Munich. We could get there with the suburban-line train. I was still at the art academy.

Kidlat Tahimik had already started working on *Perfumed Nightmare* before the birth of our first son. When I was in hospital to give birth, Kidlat was in Paris to shoot this scene with the meat cart. I already had somewhat of a feminist outlook, and in that year the law finally changed in Bavaria so that a mother could have exclusive custodial rights for her children. I immediately went to the authorities and said: “I want the custodial rights.” I was pissed with Eric,<sup>1</sup> because he had been filming in Paris. He learnt that he had a son while they were shooting the scene in which he is swinging on the meat hooks inside this truck.

And then it took him almost a week to get back home. He has always had these lapses in communication when he’s unreachable. You then have to ask some friends where he is. Although he is so friendly, he is a difficult person in private. I’ve often got vexed in such situations. But I myself was no home bird expecting to be fed.

I was glad that I could be independent and wasn’t with a man who completely laid claim on me.

**TH/TB:** Can you tell us about your studies at the Art Academy in Munich?

**KdG:** I had an utterly brilliant professor, Robert Jacobsen, a Danish sculptor. He was the kind of professor who came to the studio with his jacket buttoned in any old way. He offered us freedom. The whole Academy was in revolt at that time. During the five years I was there, we could experiment. Before that it was super-regulated, afterwards as well. What I made there, with the exception of the leaded glass windows, was not considered as art. I also produced microscopic drawings, highly accurate drawings of human tissue and blood and so on. The rest of the time, I actually led a genuine artist's existence.

I had a friend, Dieter Cornelius, who's already passed away. His family took me in. Because I didn't like my family at all. From the beginning I felt as though I was in the wrong family. I'm on the wrong planet. I'm on the wrong track. His family was vegetarian and into naturopathy and had homeopathic doctors. His father was professor of religious science. A highly educated family that lived in a small house on the Ammersee, where they had their own vegetable garden. They had even planted a little extra for the field mice, which my mother had always curbed with poison. Every weekend there were artist get-togethers at Ammersee, with string quartets and all that. The Ammersee is truly an artists' lake. And that's where I grew up.

**TH/TB:** How did you get to know Kidlat?

**KdG:** On the street in front of the Academy. He was driving around with his jeepney, and we said: "Wow, look at that car." And then, the car stopped right there, in the middle of the street. And then a head in a Mongolian cap popped out and said: "I'm going to an exhibition. Want to come along with me?" And, of course, we jumped right in. That's how we got to know each other.

**TH/TB:** Kidlat Tahimik received the jeepney from the Philippine Olympic Team who had come to Munich for the Olympic Games in 1972—this is still an incredible story for me. How he wanted to earn some cash for himself by selling copies of the Olympic mascot Waldi. He had them produced from capiz seashells in

**the Philippines, which is a traditional folk art there. However, he couldn't sell them in Munich...**

**KdG:** That's why he moved in with us in the women's commune. Because there was a lot of storage space upstairs, where he then had his tiny room. It was soon filled up with Waldi boxes and other stuff. And he sold the contents of these boxes from his jeep, from Oslo right down to Italy over a two-year period. But I wasn't in on the fiasco with the Waldis. We only met in September 1972, that is after the Olympic Games.

And then we ran into each other again six months later. I had just moved into the women's house in the Arget Artist Community, and we still had a vacant room. Every cent counts for students, and we thought: "Hey, whom will we let it to?" We didn't find any more women. And then I spotted Kidlat Tahimik on Leopoldstrasse. I really ran after him. He has such a smooth gait, which is quite different to the German one. And I rushed after him on the street and asked him: "Hey, do you need a flat by any chance?" I knew that he had to quit the dormitory where he was staying. He checked out the small room and said "Yes." And all the women said: "Well, he won't do us any harm." And then he came with three jeepney-loads of boxes full of Waldis and deposited them in our storage room, and lived in a tiny little room. Later we moved back to Munich. Into a quite nice apartment on Nördliche Auffahrstallee. Kidlat had to drive in and out of Munich every day, because he was spending longer and longer hours at the editing table. Editing *Perfumed Nightmare* took him two and a half years.

**TH/TB:** **So the footage from the Philippines already existed at this time?**

**KdG:** Yes. He travelled down there with Hartmut Lerch. I wasn't involved. They shot it all down there and then he sat at the editing table for two and a half years. And I lived on social welfare benefits. I interrupted my studies. It wasn't easy. But for me it was more important to be free. I was such a rebel from an early stage.

**TH/TB:** Kidlat shot some footage in Germany for a second film, *Who Invented the Yo-Yo? Who Invented the Moon Buggy?*

**KdG:** To be frank, I was already quite fed up at that stage. I felt like a single mother. He was, after all, never there. While working on *Perfumed Nightmare*, he only slept at the editing table. I think he just fed himself on chocolate and *Leberkäse* [meatloaf] and didn't go out any more. Then this girlfriend of mine with five daughters moved out to Pöttmes. And then afterwards we moved to Pöttmes as well.

So there was an intermediate phase, during which he took the small two and a half-year-old Kidlat to festivals. He dragged him along everywhere, even to the Cannes Festival.

And I simply wanted to get back to my studies and finish my diploma. I did that in Pöttmes. I welded together an iron figure of a man made from a lot of gherkin tins. To open him up you needed a tin-opener, to get at least a glimpse of what he looks like inside. Then I made a woman, a kinetic sculpture of a woman, which was made of out concrete, with its limbs out of plaster casts. The woman didn't have a head, for a woman doesn't need to think. A chives pot was fitted in that space. That was my graduation presentation piece, for which I even obtained an award. Afterwards we moved to the Philippines.

**TH/TB:** You mentioned that you had already resigned yourself to being a single mother, because Kidlat was not suitable for family life. Why then did you decide to relocate with this man to a foreign country whose language you did not speak?

**KdG:** I was in the Philippines for the first time in 1973. From the outset, I liked the country. The people were super friendly. And I met my mother-in-law, whom I also dearly liked. She was a fantastic woman. And then we went to America, where we met his mother's brother, Victor Oteyza. He was a painter and a fascinating person as well. After that, I thought to myself: "Even if he is like he is, after all there's so much potential." His relatives convinced me that this is a family, to which I also wanted to belong.

I trusted Kidlat's mother from the beginning. I knew that she would never attack me, she would protect me, and that is exactly how she behaved. Even if I had a fight with him, she never took his side. She was not a feminist, as that didn't yet exist, but a suffragette. She always pointed out to me: "Katrin, you have to create your own

opportunity.” She was a woman full of wisdom, in fact incredibly persuasive and highly cultured.

At some stage I forgave Kidlat his vanities, the narcissism and solipsism. I’m now undergoing exactly the same thing with my children. My second son is a tremendous genius in terms of art. But at times he can be such an unpleasant guy. And then my oldest son, Kidlat, is constantly telling me: “Take people as they are, that is also a Filipino strong point.” Early on it was clear to me that I wouldn’t marry someone from my own cultural background. I don’t know why. But what keeps us together is a common mission.

I had a recurring dream, for years. At least once a year I had this recurring dream. A line is drawn, as if with a felt pen, over a map. It starts somewhere in Europe and ends somewhere in Asia, and I never knew where. And after I had been in the Philippines for three years, I suddenly realized that this was the dream I had had in my youth. At that time the Philippines were completely unknown in Germany. That’s exactly where this line ended.

Then I had other dreams that simply told me clearly: This is my rightful place, and that he is the right person with whom I will work there. We really had a stormy marriage. But some good things have remained. When we were living in Paris, we were once at a flea market, and this guy came up to us. I don’t know whether he was from North Africa, maybe he was a gypsy. Anyway, he took a look at us and said: “You’re so different, but you’re exactly alike.” I believe in visions. We are moving in the same direction.

**TH/TB: What is this common mission you mention?**

**KdG:** I wrote this book about Philippine psychology. And moreover I founded this Heritage and Arts Foundation, which works with indigenous peoples. I have given conferences, which he [Kidlat] is now continuing. Our superstructure is a similar vision.

When I was seventeen, I went from compartment to compartment in the suburban train and had a close look at people’s shoes. They were all new. I then said to myself: “Somehow my time is up here.” What will happen with these worn shoes? They will be thrown away. Where will they end up? What happens to them? I never accepted this disposable society. Such ideas did not arise as a result of our collaboration. They had existed beforehand, but they become more strongly pronounced as a result of our working together.

**TH/TB: Can you describe the family situation into which you married?**

**KdG:** It was an upper-middle class family. Kidlat's mother was mayor and wanted to become the governor. All the money was spent on this, and yet she did not win. The family was mainly kept alive by Eric's father's engineer salary. He constructed large, hotel-like boarding houses on the outskirts of the city, which couldn't be sold off and never brought in any income. Both of them were still connected to ordinary people. The mother launched an Ifugao folk dance group, which performed for tourists. The father also bought up all kinds of carvings, but not the best pieces. It was commonly known that anything you couldn't find a buyer for in Baguio, you could still sell to Victor de Guia.

Kidlat's grandmother plays the mother in *Perfumed Nightmare*. She was a tough businesswoman. When the Americans bombed the city, she remained in her store so that nothing would be stolen. She was buried alive and dug out again, but none of her stuff disappeared. She had several plots of land, purchased before the war at a time land was still cheap. And she had two stores.

Our basic needs were always assured. If we didn't have money to send our children to school, then his mother paid the school fees, as she did for the clothes for the most part. We lived in a huge house on the edge of the city, in one of those hotels that wouldn't sell. Eric got it for our family. We gave workshops there. The house was immediately re-partitioned. We had long-term guests. If he [Kidlat] had a little money, he passed it on. If he had cameras, he gave them to Sunflower Film and Video Collective. People borrowed cameras, shot their films, brought the cameras back broken. Getting them repaired was then a matter for Kidlat Tahimik. Exactly the same story with editing. Bricco Santos edited his debut film on the editing-table in our house.

I can't say that my life was easy. At times there was money, at other times none at all. Sometimes we had to eat the same foodstuff for weeks on end, because of no money. This only changed after Eric's grandmother died, and his mother inherited some land that she then wisely invested in a high-rise on the main thoroughfare. Before it was completed, there was an artists' bar downstairs. Oh, what do I mean by bar? A group just played live there, and beer was sold out of beer crates. Art was as a constant part of life, and his mother supported that as well.



Baguio has this curious mix of rich and poor, of indigenous people and Manileños who migrated there. It's a colorful mix from all kinds of artistic backgrounds. Like the unknown Rene Aquitania, who did his news paper installations in the streets, or the studio artists Santi Bose and Willy Magtibay, both relatively well-known Filipino painters. They all got together in Baguio. Then Benedicto Cabrera (Bencab—National Artists by now) joined and Roberto Villanueva moved up from Manila, who did ephemeral installations.

There was always the **TH/TB**: How about the women? We were maybe three or four women artists, but we got zero recognition. The men started things. The men made things happen. The men made the decisions. This is still the case today: men peer into the bottle, and women can't afford to do that; they have to mind the children at home.

**TH/TB:** So that means that you also continued working on your artwork, for example on the leaded lights.

**KdG:** Yes, you can see that in one of the films. Once I nearly poisoned the whole family, because I made this acid out in the garden. The children had lots of red spots on their faces, and all the leaves started falling.

Our house was great. It had three floors, downstairs were the studios, we lived on the middle floor, and upstairs was the editing-table and two other rooms. At any given time there would be some musicians or artists living there, who didn't have a place to stay. They worked with us on the films, gave a hand with the children and helped in the garden. We took care of the food and paid for the electricity, the transport and equipment they needed.

**TH/TB:** If one examines Kidlat's filmography, there are periods during which he regularly made films, but there are also long breaks in between. Did he always work on his films? Or, were there phases when he was taken up with other things?

**KdG:** He was constantly working on the films. He also directed festivals, worked with the municipality, because they knew him and his family. He also had some projects that brought in a little money, and here and there a screening. My mother-in-law supported us all this long while. We could drop the children off with her because she had employees. And if we really were out of money, she would even

pay the gasoline for the car. We were certainly very dependent. She herself was also an actress at one stage. She loved art, and she loved her son.

**TH/TB:** And the films that her son made?

**KdG:** She didn't understand them, but she was like Kidlat, who is absolutely one hundred per-cent positive. She simply supported everything and put up with him. You know well what he looks like, with his funny pants and dirty fingernails. When her son appeared at the Rotary Club, she never kicked him out, but tolerated him with a smile and said, "Well, he's an artist".

**TH/TB:** What were your contributions to the two other films that were made in Germany, *Who invented the Yo-Yo?* *Who invented the Moon Buggy?* and *Turumba* ?

**KdG:** I only fully understood the *Yo-Yo* film much later. That was the time I really had it with all the film making, so I really didn't want to take part. During the shoot he sent our son Kidlat outside without a jacket and hat and let him play around for ages. I was pissed off. You can also see that in the film. He disregarded that, just as he disregards everything, cold and hunger or whatever. He can disregard everything. In fact, he completed this film much later. At the point, I simply had enough of the lot. He would have been better chopping wood instead of making a stupid film. So I didn't contribute much to that film, and nonetheless it has become my favorite one.

**TH/TB:** Does that still irk you today?

**KdG:** Not at all. By no means. I believe that my contribution helped to raise awareness in Kidlat Tahimik about who he really is. Kidlat's family originally came from Pangasinan, a province at the foot of the mountains. There is an incredible number of healers and believers there, believers in the sense of seers. They did not want to become a Spanish colony. They were pushed back by the Spanish army as far Pangasinan, a province on the edge of the Cordilleras. And nowadays there are still the most miracle healers. Somehow they held out there. The Spanish armies never went into the mountains. Whenever the Spaniards came, the local people headed up the

mountains, and came back down again after the Spaniards had left. My theory is such that Kidlat probably inherited many genes from his ancestors in Pangasinan. My mother-in-law had that. If you watch her walking, it's as though she never fully touches the ground. She was somehow so light-footed. I also brought it to her attention. She said she indeed goes to church, but much more important for her is that she talks to God every day. She does this in her own quiet way. There was nothing she couldn't cope with. She had magic in her, somewhere. She managed to get the jeepney onboard the ship during Typhoon Gloria. How she managed that and how she got permission and persuaded people to get this jeepney onto the ship during the typhoon... That was the typhoon after which martial law was imposed in the Philippines... And there are many such moments.

**TH/TB:** What kind of jeepney? The one in *Perfumed Nightmare*?

**KdG:** Yes, exactly that one. It had to be brought to Germany for the Olympics. It didn't fly after all.

**TH/TB:** I always understood that this jeepney was supposed to be a goodwill gift from the Philippine Olympic team for Germany.

**KdG:** Yes. The jeepney was built or bought by Eric's family. He had the money after all. He had work at the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Europe. That was how he could take the jeepney over to Germany. He drove the Olympic team around, as a touristy thing. But it was his family that built it.

**TH/TB:** Also with the intention that the jeepney would play a role in a film in Germany?

**KdG:** No, only as his car and as a sales car, as an attraction. He really did not want to stay in Germany. The jeepney had a road license for one year. When the TÜV [German businesses that provide inspection and product certification services, eds.] first opened the bonnet, a pump engine lay inside and the cables were not blue and red, but all black. The German technicians closed the bonnet and said they couldn't do anything with it. Werner Herzog wanted to revamp it, so that it could be driven. He didn't succeed. That would have been too difficult.

**TH/TB:** So this jeepney was up and running for only a year?

**KdG:** And then it got a one-year extension. After that it was up.

**TH/TB:** What became of it?

**KdG:** Werner Herzog bought it. And with that money Kidlat Tahimik shot his debut film for 10,000 marks; that was the production money. Herzog thought this was a cool thing. “Now I’ll get it ready it for European roads.” But that wasn’t possible.

**TH/TB:** Werner Herzog appears to have played an incredibly important role for Kidlat. Was he a friend? Or was he just someone who somehow made guest appearances in Kidlat’s life?

**KdG:** I only heard this, as I wasn’t present. Werner Penzel related this. When Werner Herzog first saw Kidlat, he looked at him and then took him in his arms and whirled him round in a circle. From the beginning there was simply a liking for Kidlat Tahimik. Herzog kept having a look at the film in the making [*The Perfumed Nightmare*, eds.]. He came along with Kidlat to my house and said to me: “He’ll never complete it before your birthday. You’ll have to give him more time.” At that time Werner Herzog believed me more than Kidlat Tahimik, who was constantly saying: “Yes, two more weeks, three more weeks. I’m almost ready.” These were totally comical stories. Werner Herzog was so patronizing. He likes all sorts of people. He likes what is unusual. We met him somewhere in America. Even now, every time he meets him, “Ahh Kidlat.” And still embraces him. He has a Russian wife now, and lives in Hollywood. This Russian is a few degrees cooler than the earthy Werner Herzog.

Maybe you weren’t aware that Kidlat’s mother used to export Philippine neck chains and seashell lamps to France. She had a customer there. And in this way she always sent us some food, so that her son had something for his supper. She was a kind woman. She sent us an entire brand-new set of dishes from the Philippines to Munich because we had no dishes—for at that time there weren’t that many second-hand stores.

Our food was paid from my social income support. At some point, the 10,000 marks were also all used up in post-production and then in the end he only had these seashell lamps and paid the

last bit of editing-room with his lamps. I can still see the guy's face, as he hadn't reckoned on that. But, better than nothing at all.

**TH/TB:** **The myth goes that *Perfumed Nightmare* was edited at night at the University of Film and Television.**

**KdG:** No, that was only perhaps for a year until the guys had finished. Hartmut [Lerch], Werner [Penzel], and Rotraut Kühn were no longer students afterwards. Those who could have slipped him in at night were no longer students. They had to sign in after all. And after that, he cut the film at H.P. Meier. Meier is a friend of my brother, who also lived at this weekend house at Ammersee, where my brother now lives. We know him from sailing. He had an editing-room in Munich, and he was also a filmmaker. He let him [Kidlat] cut his film there for half a year.

Then editing continued at Charlie Fugunt's. Things were hectic in the studio. Charlie was editing *Sendung mit der Maus* [popular German TV series for children, eds.]. There wasn't much time left. In the end, Charlie found someone else in Grünewald, a really commercial place, and that's where the film was finished.

**TH/TB:** **Your contribution to the then unfinished film about Magellan, *Memories of Overdevelopment*, strikes me as particularly important. Can you tell us about this production? There were proper sets constructed for this film...**

**KdG:** We were living, as it were, in these sets. Wherever we lived, it always looked something like this. Everything was improvised. This jazz cellar, the Baguio Arts Guild, this group of artists. At some point, Briccio Santos had a café, which became such a center as well. There was never a shortage of people in Baguio who improvised an entire set within two hours and somehow threw it together without two nails. My mother-in-law had a treasure trove of cloths, earrings and jewelry. She was mayor and always had to wear them on her person. We made use of all of that.

The fabric came from a weaver in Baguio, who used indigenous materials. I went to the flea market and bought a load of silk and tulle, and whatever was available. And my own stuff, my collection from Europe, everything turned up in the film. Eric was always saying to me in the evening: "Tomorrow we need such a costume. Can you sew it overnight?" I had been at fashion school, and so I always made clothes over night. That was fun. This was an improvisation

and experimentation art scene, as it had been in Munich in the late 1960s. In the Philippines, it just continued. It was really a lot of fun. In that sense, I also contributed a lot to the film.

**TH/TB:** **The Magellan film was the last attempt to make a proper movie. After that, family life becomes, as it were, the creative work—charged of course with historical, contemporary significance. But nevertheless, this family, which is also your family and to which you belong, became the films' central theme. How do you feel about becoming a constant source for film scenarios? Especially since Kidlat said that you are camera-shy. I wouldn't think you were, seeing you pop up in his movies.**

**KdG:** If you watch it, I'm always playing something like a cameo role. Except in the Magellan film, because I found it very fascinating and quite in order. I could follow the line of thought that Western culture claims everything for itself and gives nothing in return to other cultures. The poor in the Philippines are much more cultured than we are. When eating chicken, they take a small piece and look at it, smell it and then slowly nibble at a small bit. There is much more tolerance, you don't have to continually tell others what to do, or instantly give someone a tap on the head. I find that cultured.

**TH/TB:** **Kidlat told us in the interview we had with him that he adapted his film work to benefit family-life. While he didn't give up filming as such, at some point he gave priority to educating his sons. And the films became a spin-off of sorts.**

**KdG:** Yes, that's true in a sense. Kawayan, for example, was born prematurely. He was six-and-half months old and was a problem child from the beginning. So I could have never coped with him alone. Eric has infinite patience. He took him through school. I couldn't even speak Tagalog. Our first son Kidlat is enormously gifted, a case study of a fast learner. But the other two were rather slow learners. Their father really made up for that. He studied together with them, and did homework until ten at night.

Then I started preparing for my own studies and really was completely taken up with them. From then on, he really didn't have any more spare time. But what he doesn't mention, I guess, is also connected with his videos. He has boxes upon boxes full of videos at home. Heaps of unedited stuff. So he did continue to shoot stuff. He

bought himself new cameras and adapted to the new formats, which was always the source of a family drama. We needed underwear and socks for the children, and he went off and bought himself yet another new camera. There are gems in the footage from that time. I hope that our son Kidlat will edit it some day. They have all the makings of good movies.

He was then adopted by a spiritual group, he and Kabunyan. The woman at the top is the leader of the Millennium Movement, which still exists in the Philippines, the Resalitas group, the healing groups and so forth. She is the head, a healer or a shaman, a native original, unlearned, but gifted from within herself through incarnation from very earlier times. He filmed so many rituals that would make beautiful films. He didn't stop filming. But he stopped making films with the footage.

Furthermore, my mother-in-law eventually came down with dementia. He had to be there to take care of her. Since that time we have lived in separate houses. I didn't want to move in with them. I kept living on the city outskirts, in the family house. My sons lived with me there for a little longer. But they also moved out as their own children starting getting bigger and would have fallen down all these wooden stairs. I'm living there to this day.

**TH/TB: In this high-rise that once belonged to Kidlat's father?**

**KdG:** No. In a house that is even crazier than the high-rise. With a turtle house. There are lots of Hobbit houses there. After our first house burnt down, the original, the Sunflower Collective. This was a normal wooden structure, everything rectangular. Then Kidlat, along with Kabunyan, our youngest, and partly with two laborers, built a completely new settlement of small houses from all the bent iron and burnt wood, like a phoenix from the ashes.

**TH/TB: One can see that in the film *Roofs of the World, Unite!* One can see the burnt-down house and the first reconstructions as well.**

**KdG:** Yes. And also in the new film [*Balikbayan#1*], this water, where Magellan tosses the root about and plunges it into the bathtub. It was so cold on that day. That's also [filmed] in this house. He wanted to build a pond, although there's no water in summer. I meanwhile filled it with stones. He has a visionary fantasy. These houses are impractical in terms of cleaning them. No store-room, no shelves, nothing. But visually, really very interesting houses. I love living

between huge panoramic windows with a view of the forest. No straight corners anywhere. Everything is askew and crooked, as Rudolf Steiner had also suggested.

**TH/TB:** **So Kidlat is not just a filmmaker, but he has created a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which also spans the fields of architecture and performance art?**

**KdG:** I would call what Kidlat does “lecture performances.” In Baguio there was this ritual artist Roberto Villanueva, who in the meantime passed away. He created such fantastic works all over Asia, but eventually came down with leukemia. Kidlat is assimilating that. Some people say: “He’s assimilating that. But that’s ours. Why’s he doing that now?” The way I see it is that he always uses everything just to get his message out. This message I find important and good. One should simply regard that everything is an instrument for him to make himself heard: That all this modernity, which has been imposed upon us in the Philippines, leads to nothing but doom. Fields being poisoned. Trees being felled. Seas being polluted. Just because everyone wants to make a profit. People in the Third World countries should think about whether this is really a good idea, or whether the indigenous tribes don’t also offer models of survival. That would be the message.

**TH/TB:** **Cameras seem to have been ubiquitous in family life. Wasn’t that disturbing at times?**

**KdG:** My children grew up that way. The camera was always present. It annoyed me at times, and I said to him: “Do you ever look at things at all, or do you only see them through the camera?” But Kidlat has a technique to hold the camera in such a way that people don’t even notice they’re being filmed. That is why he is also successful with documentary film making, because he simply keeps on talking to the people and doesn’t even look into the camera anymore.

**TH/TB:** **What about Kidlat’s identification with or interest in Ifugao culture, which kept on intensifying in the 1980s and 1990s. What’s your take on that?**

**KdG:** It’s an exchange. Kidlat met Lopez Nauyac, who invariably appears in his films, at a video workshop. Lopez Naujac is an Ifugao who



moved down from the mountains to Baguio because he could sell more of his carvings there. Out of this encounter, a friendship evolved over the years, probably because at some stage Lopez began to say: “Now we’ve been using wood for years. We have to plant trees again.” And then he started to plant in his mountain village. This was documented by Kidlat Tahimik as part of a project on the Ifugaos together with social scientists. That was for UNESCO.

There was a woman who documented the stories. And another woman, who also did interviews. Kidlat Tahimik was so impressed at how the irrigation ran through the rice terraces there, that the forest at the summit is kept alive, because the forest then provides water that irrigates all the fields right down to the valley. Herein lay the origin for this fascination. Then he offered to give workshops to the Ifugaos: first to the young people, then to the men and then to the women. For that, he received a small grant from Japan. Lopez and his family were truly fascinating. He planted entire mountain sides. The local authorities said: “You see, we have only fields of sweet potato.” Whereupon Lopez said: “Well, then plant in the sweet potato fields. The sweet potato also grows alongside trees, and in a few years you will have wood and fruits.” Lopez began that single-handedly.

Then some workshops took place. Kidlat trained some Ifugaos to become video-workshop facilitators. These farmers have broken all the cameras. Invariably, the button they pressed was broken on all of them. All ten cameras he got from Japan ended up broken.

Then he exchanged a plot with Lopez. He hoodwinked a plot from his mother that was worthless to her, due to it being rocky. It lay outside Baguio. He exchanged this for a small paddy, on which he then built a small hut. This is his Ifugao residence. Through this came the contacts with Japan, which, in turn, financed a “School of Living Tradition” at which young people once again learn to weave and to dance.

Kidlat Tahimik has helped so many people. They always come to him if they need money. Someone is in hospital, they want to sell something, they want this, they want that, they need advice, they need a lawyer. They all come to Kidlat Tahimik. One has cancer. There’s a Chinese doctor in Baguio who doesn’t ask that much and who can treat it. I don’t know whether you know about astrology or what you make of it? If you imagine the horoscope as a round shape, Kidlat Tahimik has everything sitting in his Sun position. He can’t do anything about it. This is an astrological disposition that he has.

He was born during the Second World War. His parents had married as the war was approaching and because everybody knew that the Japanese took any unmarried woman as a “comfort woman” [forced prostitute, eds.]. So they just got married very quickly. Eric was born in October 1942 during the carpet bombing on Baguio. I once asked him what his earliest memories were. After considerable thought, he said that it was the din of these bombers dropping bombs. That is his earliest memory.

The fact that he is now collecting so much and arranging things in such a way is, in my opinion, a result of coming into this world during this absolute chaos. He moved back and forth for six months, between hiding in the mountains and the city where his grandmother didn't leave her shop. This chaos is still present in his life. It is probably in his films as well: the attempt to make sense out of the chaos. He also re-arranges his installation pieces over and again. He is just looking for something secure.

## Reference

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## Note

<sup>1</sup>Katrin de Guia sometimes refers to Kidlat Tahimik by his original name, Eric, as in Eric de Guia. Naming is further complicated by the fact that Eric de Guia only assumed his *nom de guerre*, Kidlat Tahimik, after their first son had been born and named Kidlat, making the father Kidlat junior, the son Kidlat senior.

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