

Hybrid Formats  
continued from page 37

marked onto the film itself. The slower pace of work allows for deliberation before making decisions. Nonlinear editing, in contrast, allows the editor to try more possibilities in the same amount of time. Mistakes can be corrected quickly. I'm still learning the fine points of the reverse telecine and other technical matters, and I don't know yet whether the lists generated will be accurate and the negative cutting painless, but I'm hoping that this software lives up to all that it promises.

*Jesse Lerner is a filmmaker and assistant professor of Media Studies at Pitzer College, part of Southern California's Claremont Colleges.*

## A Letter to Glauber Rocha

by Ming-Yuen S. Ma

**W**e have never met in person. When I was asked to write an essay about learning in my media practice, my first thought was how I learned from my mistakes. I know it is a cliché to say that, but what I am referring to is more specific: To learn to create new forms from the technical imperfections and mistakes in my work. This statement reminded me of something you said, "It's better to have a form that's badly polished but new." That is why I think it is appropriate for me to share some of my thoughts on this subject with you.



Cinema Nôvo filmmaker Glauber Rocha's "aesthetics of hunger" influenced Ming-Yuen S. Ma's own "anti-slick" approach to video art. Pictured: Ma's *Mother/Land* (2000)

In your 1965 discussion of the "aesthetics of hunger," you linked your film practice to the very real conditions of hunger, poverty, and violence in Brazil and Latin America, which is reflected in what you called your "ugly, sad films, these yelled, desperate films where reason did not always have the final word." Your powerful manifesto remind-

# PROFESSIONAL Storage for Digital Video

## Any Format

HDV, SD, HD Uncompressed

## Any Host

Mac, PC, Linux, SGI

## Any Platform

AJA, Avid, Blackmagic, etc.

**VideoRAID FCR2X**  
2 Gbit Fibre Channel Disk Arrays

**Medea**  
888-BY-MEDEA  
www.medea.com

ed me of the “anti-slick” ideology of early Asian American independent filmmakers. Although I do not now live in the Third World, I believe my condition as an Asian American media artist, working in the “belly of the beast,” maintains certain parallels with the predicament you outlined in your manifesto. My attraction to “imperfect” forms and to working under limited circumstances stems from my belief in “less is more,” that under pared-down conditions, away from the seduction (and distraction) of bigger budgets and commercial interests, I am more aware of the unexpected solutions that can result from controlled experimentation, and sometimes from accidents, mistakes, and imperfections. I would like to tell you about two examples of such a learning process in my own work.

*Mother/Land* (2000) is an experimental video that uses my mother’s migration in 1995 from Hong Kong to London as a starting point to create a meditation on the separations and departures that have shaped my identity and family history, the city of Hong Kong where I grew up, and the larger Chinese Diaspora. When I was making the tape, I reviewed many hours of footage from my family’s collection of home movies. As they were shot mostly by my parents, the footage was riddled with in-camera edits and jump cuts—a condition common in home movies shot on Super-8 or 8mm film stock. About midway through my viewing, I realized these “ready-made” jump cuts could be used as a visual metaphor for the many separations explored in the video itself. With this realization, I restructured the video so that jump cuts became the primary editing strategy and organizing principle for the work. I incorporated segments of home movies with the original jump cuts intact, and edited the video *against* the principles of flow. Instead of striving for seamless transitions between different shots, I emphasized the disruption of the cut as a parallel to *Mother/Land*’s narrative leaps between voices, time, and geographical locations.

While *Mother/Land* was edited on an analog system, my next project *Movements East–West* (2003) was edited using a nonlinear system. Working in the digital environment allowed me to create multilayered images without losing video generation. The editing strategy for this video is radically different from *Mother/Land* in that it is composed almost entirely from dissolves. The computer requires a large amount of memory for processing these composite images and for storing the rendered files. Insufficient memory sometimes creates freeze frames during video playback. I noticed that these freeze frames create an interesting tension with the flow of image and sound in the video, in which events from my personal and family history mingle and intersect seamlessly with wars and global social movements. When the images flow, time, space, and history are merged in the audio and visual layering. When the freeze frames occur, the cultural and historical specificity of these images reassert themselves. Fascinated with this tension, I ended up incorporating freeze frames into the finished work

I am more aware of the unexpected solutions that can result from controlled experimentation, and sometimes from accidents, mistakes, and imperfections.

to highlight this dynamic between the sense of suspension in a “de-territorialized” existence and the historicity of the socio-political movements depicted.

I suppose this letter is a thank you of sorts. Your manifesto provided a framework through which I can reframe limitations as resources. As I learn from imperfections and mistakes, I can keep in the back of my mind the larger social and political significance of such a practice.

*The Los Angeles-based Ming-Yuen S. Ma has been creating video art for the past ten years. For more information on the videos mentioned in this essay, visit [mingyuensma.org](http://mingyuensma.org).*

## Creating Overtime

by Benita Raphan

**W**ith the accessibility of information and the incessant development of new technology, what one needs to know seems limitless, and goes far beyond cultivating creative skills.

In many cases the skills I have learned that have helped me the most in developing my own films were those I have acquired that had nothing to do with filmmaking: entrepreneurial thinking, organizational abilities, team-building skills, marketing, publicity, intellectual property issues, and the simplest things like being able to communicate an idea clearly over the telephone.



This image from *The Critical Path*, Raphan’s film about Buckminster Fuller, was created using Flame. It is a composite of three images: the woman, the Michigan landscape, and the film leader.

New knowledge comes from the most surprising places, so paying close attention has always been worthwhile. Aside from the obvious, like showing up on time and wearing clean clothes to job interviews, the most important thing I learned at any job was six years ago when I