

Read! This is not the Beginning First [See Appendix A]

Interview MS. Found on a Floppy Disc: Some Reflections of "Processed Narratives" and David Blair's Wax, or the Discovery of Television Among the Bees

**A Sign-Processed Meta-Hypertextual Critical Narrative
by Larry McCaffery²**

A shattered mirror still functions as mirror; it may destroy the dual relation of 1 to 1 but leaves the infiniteness of life's reflection intact.³ Here reality is not reconstituted, it is put into pieces so as to allow another world to rebuild (keep on rebuilding and rebuilding) itself with debris.

--Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism*.

Hence the academic grappling with his computer . . . memorizing everything in an effort to escape the final outcome, to delay the day of reckoning of death and that other--fatal--moment of reckoning that is writing, by forming an endless feedback loop with the machine.

--Jean Baudrillard (cited by Scott Bukatman in *Terminal Identity*)

" . . . the development of the practical methods of information retrieval extends the possibilities of the 'message' vastly, to the point where it is no longer the written translation of a language, the transporting of a signified which could remain spoken in its integrity."

--Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*

I wanted to take a picture; but all I could do was dance.

--Jacob Hive-Maker (protagonist of David Blair's *Wax*)

I. Opening Statements by the Interview Participants:

Let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. . . . Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.

¹ Just to "reiterate" a point that actually hasn't yet been iterated, readers of (or collaborators with) this critical narrative are urged to turn immediately to "This is not the Beginning" (see Appendix A). NOTE: readers who follow this suggestion may then skip over the (now redundant) remainder of the opening instructions—i.e., "This is not the Beginning First [See Appendix A]"-- and proceed directly to the next line of the narrative (i.e., the title, "Interview Ms. . . .").

²Cf. "He is to be found nowhere, except possibly in the epilogue, which appears after and outside the poem itself." George P. Landow's remarks concerning the presence of the actual author Tennyson in his proto-hypertext poem, "In Memoriam." In *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1992), p. 37. See also Epilogue and Afterword(s).

³For a less optimistic view regarding mirrors, see Marshall McLuhan's summary of the Narcissus tale: "The youth Narcissus (narcissus means narcosis or numbing) mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by the mirror numbed his perception until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. . . . the point of this myth is the fact that men at once become fascinated by an extension of themselves in any material other than themselves." *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 1964, p.51. See also the discussion of the related "windows" trope, footnote #7.

--Genesis, 7-9

It's like being in the [Sa~va ?]--not that I ever was there.
--David Blair.

Now, [?].
--Brooks Landon.

[?~!
--Scott Bukatman.

[?]?.
--Larry McCaffery.

III. Introduction

You can create your own recontextualization of the TV experience.
--Mike Nash, "The Future of Illusion"

In early November 1992 a New York-based creator of independent electronic science fiction cinema⁴ joined an academic expedition to San Francisco for a Cybernarrative Festival of Postfuturism. This electronic video artist's name was David Blair; in *Wax, or the Discovery of Television Among the Bee*, the 85 minute film he had recently completed after nearly six years of work and which he would be screening at the Festival, he was also known as Jacob Hive-Maker.⁵ He was joined in this expedition by three critics specializing in SF, SF film, and postmodernism: Larry McCaffery, the organizer of the conference, Professor of English at San Diego State University, author of four interview books with writers and artists, including *Across the Wounded Galaxies: Interviews with Contemporary American SF Authors*; and editor of *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern SF* (Duke Univ. Press, 1992); Brooks Landon ("BL"), Professor of English, University of Iowa; author of *The Aesthetics of Ambiguity: Rethinking Science Fiction Film in the Age of Electronic (Re)Production* (Greenwood Press, 1992); and Scott Bukatman (SB), a lecturer in SF film at Yale and N.Y.U. and author of *Terminal Identity: The Virtual Subject in Postmodern Science Fiction* (Duke University Press, 1993). Together they hoped to conduct an interview with that would produce video-taped evidence of narrative life after the death of the author, the death of the critic, and the death of nearly all other aesthetic and epistemological features associated with "realism" that had dominated narrative strategies in Western culture for several centuries.

The years 1985 to 1991 found Blair-Hive-Maker in France, Lawrence (KS.), Berlin, Alamogordo's Desert Sands Test Facility (also the site where the first plutonium bomb had been detonated), London's British Museum and Manhattan (also the name of the top secret U.S. project to build the

⁴The phrase "independent electronic science fiction cinema" is taken from the cover of Wax's video cassette box. For a description of Wax as a "image processed narrative," see Window #4, Appendix B, and the lightly edited version of Window #4 (Appendix C); for insights into how Blair's "image processed narrative" concept applies to "Interview Ms. Found in a Floppy Disc," see footnote #14 and Appendix A.

⁵And Jacob . . . dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. (Genesis, xxviii, 12).

first plutonium bomb). Each day's batch of film and disparate facts brought with them new connections and narrative possibilities to light. They also brought Blair-Hive-Maker closer to his goal of completing a film recording the moving spirits of the dead--vengeful ghosts⁶ who are shown in *Wax* to swarm into Hive-Maker's world in the present (where he works in Military Systems on military flight simulators and keep bees as a hobby) in order to perpetrate an act of revenge for a murder committed by Hive-Maker's grandfather.

Released in late 1991, *Wax* is a mind-warping and yet emotionally-engaging film which relied in part for its startling and poetic visual effects on Blair's access to state-of-the-art digital image-processing and non-linear editing equipment. These new technologies had allowed Blair to manipulate the individual images in his film, and to blend documentary and archival materials, and 3-D military VR footage together with "live" location shots--all of which were subsequently reprocessed and collaged in post production. The visual resulting that emerges on the screen have been repeatedly compared by reviewers to 2001's concluding "Star Gate" sequences, but they are actually closer in look and texture to the work of early video and cinema innovators like Nam June Paik, Harry Smith, and Jordon Belson. Whatever one thinks of *Wax* as a whole, it is unquestionably one of the most startling *looking* films ever made.

In terms of its themes and plot, *Wax* deals with many of the personal, aesthetic and metaphysical issues that are emerging as a result of the same technologies Blair utilized in the making of his film. The story evolves out of a Pynchonian labyrinth of actual and imagined historical reference, Biblical, mythological and cyberpunk archetypes, Baudrillardian "simulations" of present-day pseudo-events, plus brief glimpses into quirky visual realms created by early cinema and television artists. Bathed in paranoia, grotesquerie, and black humor, and presented in Blair-Hive-Maker's evocative prose and dead-pan delivery, the end result is an image-and-information dense, hallucinatory film experience--a postmodernists roller-coaster ride that takes viewers to places that seem at once familiar and dream-like.

HOW BLAIR STORMED MY REALITY STUDIO AND TURNED MY LIFE INTO A BEE MOVIE

[They] chased you, as bees do.

--*Deuteronomy*, i, 44

In April 1992, I received a copy of *Wax* in the mail. In the brief note that accompanied the film Blair-Hive-Maker said he had decided to send me a copy of *Wax* after reading *Storming the Reality Studio*--a "casebook" of materials I had edited devoted to cyberpunk and postmodern SF. The day after he had finished my book, a thought came to him in the middle of a simulated explosion he was incorporating into his next film, *Jews in Space*: During the making of *Wax* (roughly 1985-91), he had spent a lot of time at a strange intersection through which various aesthetic and intellectual paths were crossing. Then, only the week before while he was opening up *Storming the Reality Studio* he knew something was wrong. There were voices speaking to him out of the book--many of them the same familiar voices Blair had previously over-heard at that strange intersection. This had convinced Blair-Hive-Maker that we must have somehow both been standing at the same intersection without ever having noticing each other.

⁶Cf.: "Having the experience of a ghost . . . is having the memory of what you've never lived through in the present." Derrida speaking in *Ghost Dance*. Cited in Stephen Pföhl, *death and the parasite cafe* (N.Y.: St. Martin's 1992), pp. 210, 211.

Intrigued by Blair's claim of propinquity, I was also understandably dubious. Until *Wax* arrived and began storming my own private reality studio, I'd assumed that my experiences with cross-town postmodern traffic were pretty much unique. On the other hand, like Blair I had indeed spent most of my spare time in the previous half-dozen years transfixed before a maze-like intersection that was even more confusing and bewildering than Tokyo's Shinjuku Station at rush hour. But could this really have been the same intersection?

My own intersection was a Garden of forking paths, roads, streets, highways containing everything from 16 lane super freeways, to paths for bikers and joggers, one-way city streets, pedestrian crossings, dirt roads, you-name-it. Some of them have names (Baudrillard Boulevard, Nan June Paik Road, Ballard Thru-Way, Gibson Expressway, Burroughs Avenue, Interstate Pynchon, etc.); others were anonymously filtered through an elaborate system of interchanges and overpasses. With all the vehicles and cargo whizzing by, and with some many options to process, it was no simple matter to figure out what to do, where I was or where to go, who to hitch a ride with--especially since the only assistance at my disposal seemed to be the neatly printed (but ultimately enigmatic) road signs posted on each of the by-ways. Signs like the huge rectangular monstrosity that loomed somehow overhead on a patch of land hanging in the darkness and dominating the entire landscape with its flashing neon announcement:

Entering Military-Industrial Complex

Or other signs that say things like:

Slow Down--Deconstruction Work Ahead
 Interpretations Slippery When Wet--Proceed at Your Own Risk
 VR-U.S.A. Border Ahead--Prepare to Stop
 Grotesque Post-Pynchon, Postmodern Kodak Photo Spot On Your Right
 Ghost in the Machine Crossing
 Be On the Lookout for Illegal AIs
 Whoa (You Passed It)!! Reifications of Your Own Past. Available in Standard Photo or Spiritualist Cinematography Formats.
 Linear or Causal Thinkers, Keep Right
 Interzone Inspection Station Ahead: All Simulated People and Experiences to Possible Confiscation.

THE EDGE OF A JOURNEY

"[G]hosts have images which emerge in language, expression, and modern rituals which, far from being forgotten in the new electronic age, actually make their presence increasingly felt."

-- Jacques

Derrida, as spoken in Ken McMullen's film *Ghost Dance*

When I finished Blair's letter, I could feel the darkness around me. I was on the edge of a journey.

That night as I arrived home, it occurred to me that the soul of a person could fragment and decay, and that some of these fragments might be preserved as bee-movies and then retransmitted in our own world by the same electro-chemical processes that allowed the images of dead people to visit the future in photography, television, film and video.

Soon after slipping *Wax* into my VCR, I realized that I was lost and pushed PAUSE. Untold numbers of the dead, along with ghostly image's of the once-living, were in the airwaves all around me. I wondered what my University President and Department Head would say about this latest turn in my professional interests. I wasn't an idiot or a lunatic (as some reviewers had recently claimed); I was a respected scholar and gifted teacher. I knew that my tenure would protect me. I pushed "PLAY."

I separated from the ground.

When my sight came back, I was rewinding the video. I knew I had gone someplace familiar, but I couldn't remember where.

I was drawn to the bee movie. I wanted to be in the dark again, where I knew the bees were waiting for me. They pierced the side of my head. Through this hole they inserted a mirrored crystal.

I had discovered *Wax, or the Discovery of Television Among the Bees!*

In the weeks and months that followed, I was able to stay awake when the darkness came. I watched *Wax* ten times. Twenty times. My friends began to whisper of the dangers my obsession with *Wax* posed at parties or even ordinary conversations.

I began to travel, with *Wax* as my constant companion. . . .Tokyo, thirty times. . . New York, forty. A burst of spare time during off-hours at the cybernarrative festival, pushed me past the fifty mark. My friends had been right: I was a weapon.

III. Sampled Excerpts from a sign-processed interview with David Blair

Every sentence has a truth waiting at the end of it and the writer learns how to know it when he finally gets there. On one level this truth is the swing of the sentence, the beat and poise, but down deeper it's the integrity of the writer as he matches with the language. *I've always seen myself in sentences.*

--Bill Gray (narrator of Don DeLillo's *Mao II*)

WINDOW#1⁸ #1 (ala *Dr. Strangelove*)⁹

" . . .and east of Eden he was cast."

⁷C.f. "Man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?"--*Job*, XIV, 10.

⁸My use of "windows" as headings used to display different portions of the interview is, of course, a borrowing of the "window" motif employed in several popular word processing soft ware systems (for example, I developed this essay using Microsoft Windows 5.1) and also found in various hypertext programs (hypertext being the condition to which this essay clearly aspires); the window motif was suggested by Brooks Landon. I should point out, however, that, as with the case of mirrors, negative or ambiguous associations of windows and what they give access to have tended to be emphasized by postmodern artists at least as much as any positive connotations. A famous example of the metaphysical and personal dangers windows pose for the unwary is the fatal error made by John Shade's alter ego in the opening lines of "Pale Fire": I was the shadow of the waxwing slain/By the false azure of the window pane" (in Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* [N.Y.: Putnam, 1962]), p. 33)--a fate that, in fact, "mirrors" what happens to Jacob Maker, the protagonist in Blair's *Wax*. The famous remark ascribed by Bioy Cassares to the heresiarchs of Uqbar in Borges "Tlon, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius"--i.e., "mirrors and copulation are abominable, since they both multiply the numbers of man"--would be slightly recast by postmodernists to read the "appearances" of "simulacra" of man. Certainly the omnipresence of mirror imagery in postmodern art and criticism is understandable given the rapid proliferation of technologically generated illusions and reproductions, together with the resulting loss of reality's own "substantiality." See also the discussion of mirror imagery in postmodernist art and literature, footnote #2.

⁹For a listing of some threads of connection among the subjects, tropes, metaphors, motifs, themes, and allusions found in Windows #1 and #4, see Appendix D.

--Bruce Springsteen, "Adam Raised a Cain"

Brooks Landon: The Army actually made you *move* the Garble of Eden?

David Blair: Yeah: from Basra to Kansas, because this is like '86, '87. I got a litter. It's a great litter. And I was really interested in Carlsbad anyway because of Majestic, the Roswell UFO crash, was supposed to be. The organization that talked about it was majestic. That was fanny because that also happened after [?]. Anyway, I was Lawrence¹⁰ with a friend and we were doing the documentary about the beatnik reunion in Lawrence, and [it's the camera mark¹¹ ?] who did *Wax*. He'd done a [?] documentary about the Garble of Eden [?] So that's the story of the Garble of Eden.

Scott Bukatman: Well, for those of us who don't know about the Garble of Eden with the concrete figures¹² [?].

DB: Oh, the fellow who did it was a guy named Dinsmore, who was a failed prairie populist and this, coincidentally, if you ever make things [?] and he was a civil war soldier who tried to get elected to the House of Representatives on the prairie populist ticket and he failed and, so, he ended up in [Lucas ?], Kansas and limestone. It was a place where there aren't any trees, but there's a lot of limestone and so he built himself a stone log cabin. Around the turn of the century he was like in his seventies and he married a twenty-year-old from Chicago and they started to have children and he decided he'd express himself, his ideas, and also make it a tourist attraction. It's practical. And, basically, over about ten or fifteen years he built this [local ?] sculpture. The side that faces (I can never get the directions of Eden correctly) but I guess it faces west or east. Whichever. I can never figure that out. Is the Garble of Eden . . . Is the story of the apple and, mainly, the story of Cain, because then, at the corner, Cain turns the corner with his girlfriend and his hoe and he enters America right at the corner of the Garble where the flag is and he enters the Garden, essentially, at the time of the populists. So you have all this stuff about trusts, chartered rights, about monopolies, sort of told from the perspective of a radicalized Civil War soldier. There's an octopus with its tentacle in

¹⁰Although it may initially strike some readers that Blair--whose anti-colonialist, anti-military feelings are inscribed throughout *Wax*--would appropriate the identity of "Lawrence of Arabia," a figure whose identity is so closely associated with both tendencies. But this seemingly mysterious claim isn't really unexpected in this context when one recalls that the narrator of Blair's film makes similarly puzzling claims at several points in *Wax*--e.g., "I am Zoltan Abbasid." When one also recalls the importance of the Middle East to *Wax*, along with its foregrounding of war and colonialism, the numerous sequences of *Wax* set in the desert, and so forth, Blair's Pierre-Menard-like claim that he somehow "is" Lawrence of Arabia is not entirely unexpected. See also the "Paul Blair" discussion in Window #2 and footnote #17, and his various uses of doublings, mirrors, and the "Siamese Twins" motif.

¹¹As the brackets around this text indicate, this portion of Blair's comments was somewhat garbled on the audio tape and thus the version that appears here may well have been "mistranslated" by the transcriber; but irrespective of whether or not this is an "accurate" version, these remarks nonetheless introduce a number of subtle and suggestive resonances into the context of a discussion of a film having so much to do with vision, cameras, and "marks." In his early description of the Garden of Eden, for example, *Wax*'s Hive-Maker--who is in charge of adjusting the targets fired upon by the flight simulators' "X-shaped gun sights" for accuracy--informs us that "after Cain killed his brother Abel . . . God put an X-mark on Cain's forehead" (italics, mine). At the film's climax, Hive-Maker's journey back to earth from Pluto, the "Land of the Dead," as a kind of human smart bomb is guided by "the X-shaped lead"--a primal code directing his movement to the killing of two Iraqis tank soldiers during the Persian Gulf War. When Hive-Maker's soul is finally allowed to take on its true form, it is that of "the X-shaped Siamese twins." See also the discussion of Siamese twins in footnotes #12, 21, and 24; for analysis of other forms of doubling in the film see footnotes #8, 17,

¹²Bukatman is referring to the episode in *Wax* where Hive-Maker first blacks out. He reawakens to find himself at a surreal house that "resembled the place of my birth . . . a place known as the Garden of Eden, near Abilene, Kansas." This house is boarded by concrete trees and has concrete people--Cain and Abel--on one of its sides. As with some many other hallucinatory element in *Wax*, this seemingly utterly fantastic episode is grounded in real-life. At any rate, Blair's description of the historical background of this concrete Garden of Eden is one of the interviews most vivid monologues. For related references to the "Garden" and associated imagery, see "In the Garden, In the Beginning, Before the Fall" in Appendix A.

the backpack of a civil war soldier and there's all these chains in the sculpture of, like, somebody shoots this and there's a bird which a fox eating and then the Indian is shooting the fox and a soldier is shooting the Indian in the back and a woman is reaching for his backpack and a tentacle is reaching into the backpack at the same time. So Dinsmore is very in his, "this is my stone, log cabin mausoleum," as William Burroughs would say. He taught his wife how to mummify him and he was placed in the back there in a glass-plated mausoleum in back. That was supposed to keep the thing going. You'd go pay a buck (only his descendants could get in for free) to look through the plate glass to see the mummified Dinsmore. Everybody else had to pay a buck and that was how it was going to keep his wife going. So that was his plan for the Garbleof Eden¹³. It's got all this concrete sculpture and all the trees.

[End Window #1]

WINDOW # 2: Television Wars: On the Juxtapositions of Grotesqueries (A Historical Labyrinth in the mode of *Gravity's Rainbow*)

The passion for destruction is also a creative passion
--Michael Bakunin: *Reaction in Germany* (1842)

LM: Were you doing any writing at this point [?] ?

DB: No, no, I wasn't really doing very much of anything. I was a pretty terrible, I was a good student but I didn't have anything particularly organized, and I wasn't writing because I wasn't supposed to really do anything like that. I was supposed to have a professional education. And so I went to New York and got a job. I had absolutely no training in film or video and I wasn't really very much of a writer and I got. This may sound like this is my life history but it's practical in terms of what happens with this particular project because it's sort of out of, digging my way out. But I got a job in a film house and I quit. This Israeli soldier, who was my boss, former Israeli tank commander¹⁴, with a missing finger from the war and screamed at me all the time, and so finally I quit after learning a bit. I spent the summer like many people do, nostalgic for the library, going every day for about 3 or 4 months, discovering the research library and going every day and I get up in the morning, go to the library and then for my lunch break I'd walk up to the media section of the library where I watched videotapes and that's where I learned about video and [?] and I discovered the things that were really, pretty much, what I wanted to see, which were like a program that I'd seen when I was in high school that had, there was these fellows called the [Woodney or Whitney ?] brothers, who did, basically, mathematic psychedelica in the late 60's, metamorphic [models ?] of, like, the first real video, computer graphic art that was real computer-graphic art. That was on the same program as some [?] films. It was all both abstract, structured work and hand-made work at the same time. A whole variety of heavily fantastic, fantastical in a variety of ways, film work.

¹³Cf.: He will make her wilderness like Eden--*Isaiah*, li, 3.

¹⁴The seemingly irrelevant details Blair supplies here about the missing finger of his former boss (an Israeli tank commander) is in fact a revealing instance of the way Blair's imagination constantly transforms "bits" of the "reality" of his own experience into the grotesque details that are so much part of the texture of *Wax* (see Window #2 and footnote #27 for the Blair's discussion of his thesis project on the use of the grotesque in *Gravity's Rainbow* and his ongoing interest in the grotesque generally). Note, too, the way the detail about the Israeli tank commander is recontextualized (i.e., it is the two Iraqi men in a tank that Hive-Maker kills and is later joined to as the X-shaped Siamese twins). See other references to Siamese twin motif noted earlier, footnotes #8, 9, 12, 17, 21, and 24.

LM: I was going to say, Harry Smith¹⁵.

DB: Harry Smith I never saw. I still haven't seen Harry Smith.

LM: Boy, I saw that in New York.

DB: But the film [cuts out ?] Lou [Jordan ?]. Is that it, [Lou Jordan ?], [Louis Jordan ?]?

LM: Louie Jordan--the jazz guy?

DB: Larry Jordon. From the bay area, I think. He does those sort of . . .

Scott Buckatman: Jordan [Belson ?]?

DB: Jordan [Belson ?].

SB: Oh, yeah.

DB: He does earnest cut-oops. He did it on Sophia's, like Ernst¹⁶ cut-ooop animation's that are all sort of very . . . He's sort of like a flower of Harry Smith in color. Anyway, that sort of stuff all sort of pitched in and, anyway, what I was trying to do at the library was trying to learn about a couple, specific, strange things and they all eventually turned into *Wax* in one way or another. That was the summer I read about Alamogordo****. I was trying to do a performance about Alamogordo and I read about mechanical television.

LM: You read about what now? [?]

DB: Mechanical television. Spinning discs¹⁷ that were used to scan an image and then reconstruct it. It's like a spiral on a disc with a [?] It's very simple, you-can-make-it-yourself TV. It *was* the TV up until the twenties. Actually, there was a broadcast system up until the late twenties. There was a flourish of it in the States and in England and in Germany.

SB: I've seen a PBS documentary on it. There was a British guy [John Logie Bayer].¹⁸.

DB: Paul [Baird ?]¹⁹ you mean? He could go get em.

LM: I don't remember Blair [?] British [cricket?]-and no foul balls or anything.

¹⁵The references in this stream-of-consciousness sequence of free associations by the participants are to Harry Smith (legendary avant-garde film maker, best known for a series of films which he hand painted frame by frame); Larry Jordon (a San Francisco-based video artists best known for his collage animations); Louis Jordan (jazz great from the 30s and 40s); and Jordon Belson, a leading figures in experimental films during the 60s.

¹⁶Cf. "The art of collage proves to be one of the most effective strategies in putting into question of all the illusions of representation." Group Mu, *Collage*, as quoted by Gregory Ulmer, "The Object of Post-Criticism," in Hal Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic* (Port Townsend, WA.: Bay Press, 1983), p. 84. Cited by Pföhl, p. 99. As noted earlier, Blair has a tendency--evident both in conversation and in his art--to present a continuous stream of stories or anecdotes composed seemingly heterogeneous visual and narrative elements (images, objects, historical references, concepts, details, etc.). This results in a form of signification which constantly breaks the continuity or linearity of the discourse and requires double or multiple "readings" by the audience. The non-linear editing devices used by Blair in *Wax* allowed Blair to collage images much more freely than previous editing techniques--hence facilitating the "image processed narrative" methods underlying *Wax's* compositional process.

¹⁷Cf. Blair-Hive-Maker's description of the Electric Telescope, a device invented by Ella Spiralum (who marries Hive-Maker's father) which allows the dead to travel to our world: "Spinning disks scanned mourners left behind by the dead, changing their pictures to sounds, which were transmitted through telephone wires." This is a good example of the ways that, as with Pynchon, even the most fantastic features appearing in Blair's surrealist universe are grounded firmly in actual historical details.

¹⁸A reference to John Logie Baird.

¹⁹The name is muffled and nearly inaudible on both the video and audio portions of the tape. Blair, who has listed to both version, claims that the name he spoke here was "Paul Blair," the speedy center fielder on the championship Baltimore Oriole baseball teams from the late 60s and early 70s. The introduction of this name in this context is, however, not the non sequitur that it might initially appear to be; not only does it display Blair's interest in puns and world play ("Paul Blair" is a pun on the name "John Logie Baird" just introduced by Bukatman) but, via the coincidence of having identical last names, also an opportunity to introduce one of *Wax's* key recurrent motifs--that of the double, twins, replication, and mirror images--into reality itself. At any rate, the Paul Blair reference may assist readers in recontextualizing several of the bizarre reference in the next several exchanges in the interview.

SB: Yeah.

DB: Yeah. Great oreos [terms?] of the late 60s. But Baird's a funny one, you see. Baird really comes in, not from, yeah, Baird comes in to mechanical television, but Baird is a really weird one because he also goes into the pre-war period. He was like one of those people who, like an Edison, who made a system and got the funding and such like that. And then the crystal palace burned down and it sort of went by the side, but the real reason it went by the side is they were gearing up for high-frequency television. That was something I discovered years later when I was doing the research for *Wax* was really there was this whole business of how, which was really interesting and important, there was this whole, late early thirties period when there was a television war between the U.K. and Germany, which was essentially a ,over for radar. It was a code-word for radar.

SB: Didn't Germany also have the first television [?] they actually formed [. . . ?]

DB: No, well, there were about 50, 25 stations in America. Yeah, in the late twenties there was a flourish because it was basically just radio frequency. It was a relatively narrow band width. Anyway, there's this whole, strange business with mechanical television. I mean, with the high-frequency television and that they were gearing up for radar and they knew that the only way they could actually get radar is if they created an industrial base for it. So, the way they were going to create the industrial base was through television. As they gained all the experience in the manufacturing techniques needed to produce all these high-frequency components and, so, they created a need for television, a need for twenty-five line television and then there was a competition between . . . One of the first things Hitler did when he came to power was classify all television research and at the same time his people created German television history. They rediscovered [Paul Nitka ?]²⁰ who was, sort of, the first guy who patented mechanical television and then he went on to helicopters. He was really interesting because he was a fellow who spanned the period of invention, the late nineteenth-century, he worked on the railroads. He essentially, helped design the switching signal system for the Berlin city railroad, back when Berlin was growing, back when they first needed that. That was, like, one of the infrastructures for Berlin. And he created . . . mechanical television was essentially a railroad wheel. It was as if you had the two railroad wheels and the axle between them and one side was the sender and the other side was the receiver. They were cut in half and separated in space, one from the other, but they were synchronized and rotating at the same place at the same time. He was a railroad engineer and the thing he went on to later was helicopters²¹. So that's actually, like, if you're looking for back story material this is essentially a nonlinear creation of linear text. Hopefully, that's for technical history and . . .

LM: So, this is, more or less, just not even so much professional interest so much as you were just reading as much as you could about television, the development and these kinds of . . .

DB: No, it was in the context of turning this into narrative. That was the whole point.²²

Brooks Landon: Turning what into narrative[?] ?

²⁰ The reference is to Paul Nipkow.

²¹The unexpected series of associations and connections uncovered by Blair in the course of his research for *Wax*--railroads--mechanical television--Hitler--modern television--fascism--radar--military weapons--flight simulation--language--artificial intelligence--virtual reality, etc.--recalls the collage principle (of which surrealism is a special instance) of lifting a number of elements from their familiar positioning within works or pre-existing messages and then placing them into a context where their resonances and meanings collide and interact unpredictably, producing new totalities that are often, by turns, disorienting and exhilarating for the audience. For a more extended (though only partial) listing of some connections and associations that Blair introduces in *Wax* and which are later "reflected" in the window samples, excerpts, see Appendix D.

²²See also Appendix A and footnotes #3 and #4 regarding Blair's sense of *Wax* as a "processed narrative."

DB: All these desperate facts. Let me just finish something here. I was doing that research later, when I was in Germany, because that was a real important part about *Wax*, was about how, for instance, a lot of the tools that you were using, a lot of the tools that I aspired to use, were actually, very clearly, coming out of all sorts of military research and that was the objects. From the moment that I started using them, the [real-time ?] 3-D shapes and such, they were supposed to be, in the earlier stages they were even cruder than they are in *Wax*, they were supposed to be [?] embodiments of what they were in a narrative to describe something about the military and there they were as, like in something [?] I'm sure you understand the context of what I mean for this.

SB: In other words, you were borrowing it from that kind of technology and using it to make some critical commentary[?] ?

DB: Not even so much, because the sort of irony that I'd work in . . . It wasn't an articulated commentary. It was more like a juxtaposition of grotesquerie and it represents a whole cluster of things that you would just allow to [personally be understood ?].

SB: But also an appropriation?

DB: [Not appropriation would be the ?] best way to put it because then it's much vaguer what actually . . . You are taking a [?] stance, but in creating a grotesque narrative you know that you're not separated from what you're commenting on, so the actual [?] you're going to put something that's the most reified piece of business that you could ever talk about, the missiles that you would never make and never use. Anyway . . .

BL: Can I ask a question about *Wax* for a second here?

DB: Sure, I'm sorry.

BL: Would you consider *Wax* . . . Do you think the ideas of the grotesque are strongly applicable to *Wax*?

DB: That's pretty much the guiding trope that dominates any kind of . . . That is what I understand best for fiction and this is why it was really interesting to think about humor because all this type of humor from that cluster period, the surreal humor of the *Harvard Lampoon* and the . . .

SB: Firesign Theater.

DB: Yeah, because it's grotesque, it's all about distortions and unnamable forces.

SB: Isn't the grotesque strongly about the body? Physical [with ?] body.

DB: Yes, of course.²³ I mean that's where it comes from. The grotesque is "grottoesque". It's when they [found the Raphael ?] and they discovered the paintings in the grottos, which were, like, Ovidian. The human forms subsumed to the geometric constraints of a design that was to go in a wall and bodies were merged with vegetable forms. It's very much about [?].

LM: I see *Wax* as being this way in the same way that a lot of cyberpunk is. In an odd way, this whole denaturing of the body, but also, in other words, I can see this. Were you, like, saying that you didn't feel that in the movie so much?

DB: Not quite [?] I wanted to kid around, that's the relationship, the body vs. the notion of a disembodied experience. It's true that the grotesque really is about living in the body, or maybe not so much about living in the body, but all the dislocations that incur between consciousness and the body.

SB: And a rejection of the notion of, say, transcendent, higher spirit.

DB: Belief in literal possibility or even actuality of that, but also of the utter impossibility at the same time, which [?] cyberpunk. The transcendence achieved and you're just in the next [journey ?].

²³Cf. Before returning to earth to follow his mark to the kill, Hive-Maker sees one of the dead arrive inside "dark machinery" of the Garden of Eden Cave. He says, "It was grotesque, with 4 brains on a single body. I felt that I recognized it." This creature is, of course, his double, the X-shaped Siamese Twin.

[End Window 2]

WINDOW #3. Overhead is a swarm: A Gathering at a New Round Table (in the manner of Harold Pinter)

The impious assert that absurdities are the norm in the Library and that anything reasonable . . . is almost a miraculous exception.

--J.L. Borges, "The Library of Babel"

LM: And then you found the book [?] the book²⁴?

DB: The book was one of those books from the research library that still had one of those lined pieces of paper in the back that showed, back in the 50's they used to stamp when people took them out. Nobody had ever taken this book out. It was a book that was written by . . . I cannot remember the guy's name. It was, a book about the British career of an Alexandrian-born bee reformer and it was distributed in England by the Bee Kingdom League, but published in Alexandria in [?]

SB: By who?

DB: Bee Kingdom League.

BL: Bee Kingdom . . .

SB: Kingdom . . .

LM: . . . League?

DB: Yeah. You'll have to see this book when you come over.

SB: I'm a member of the Bee Kingdom League.

DB: You are? Of course, the imprint was really, I mean, just the title and a paperbound book was by the secretary of this man, who was a fellow who'd been wounded in the world war and after the war they . . . Bee-keeping was heavily promoted to repatriate the wounded soldiers to the countryside to give them a way they could make a living, bee keeping.

LM: Now, one more time on that. What was the connection here? The bees and the military now.

DB: He was handicapped. He lost a leg²⁵ and he was there and he hitched up with [**Akhmed Zakki Abishadi ?**] who was a . . . Let me, before I tell you the story of Akhmed [?] That's *Wax*. It's the story of [**Abishadi ?**] [**this quest for ?**] The frontispiece, you open it up, the frontispiece is art by Abishadi, who was a painter and, an amateur painter, it was a round table, the nations of the world, the bee-keeping nations of the world, sitting around the table. All the third-world nations, like Egypt and Brazil, that have thought of honey production were sort of sitting, like, facing in towards England and America, who were talking to each other, like this, and they were all sort of on the sidelines. On

²⁴Cf. During the Jacob Hive-Maker's long trek to the Land of the Dead, he once observes the following scene: "On the wall of the bookshelf was a vibrating bookshelf, which held a crystalline book. In the book was the story of the bees, told in secret words shaped from the bodies of the dead."

²⁵Again one notes the application of the grotesque to the body. See notes 8 & 17.

the painting overhead is a swarm²⁶ and on the table is a globe and on the globe it says, "Esperanto."²⁷ And there's three hives in front, which say, "prosperity," you know, one of those typical three, you know, it's like "fraternity," "democracy," no, it's "fraternity," "education," and, I don't know "scalability." So, anyway, and it had the Esperanto, that was the big thing. That was very impressive because, I think, I was looking at a little bit of artificial language at the same time and I found it.

SB: Why were you looking at artificial language at the same time you were doing research on bee-keeping?

DB: Well, because the sort of . . . I'll show you. I'll draw it for you. [begins to draw.]

LM: Bee language?

DB: Because I spent a lot of time . . . I spent several months by myself doing things like this, but I could do it much nicer, but it's not doing it anymore. You know, I've [filled ?] books like that and . . .

LM: Bee language . . . ?

[End Window 3]

Window #4. You Don't Fuck with the Occult: Strange islands of negative space (For a comparison of this window section with its subsequent rebirth²⁸ as a lightly edited version, see Appendix C.)

SB: Just within your [audience ?]. You made a video, as opposed to a ritual [?] reality environment, but, within the video, the concept of the virtual reality environment is being, and stressed over and over, being approached in a lot of different ways. [?]

DB: You see, the thing about ritual reality is, when I started it, there was no term for that. Back in '85 people didn't know about stimulation. They didn't know about the realism of flight stimulation environments. So I'd actually show people these real-time graphics and when I got these from the contractor and[?].

LM: I'm interested in where you got those too – how you got access to those military ritual reality films. . . I mean, aren't those supposed to be Top Secret or something?

DB: That's another one of those antidotes I need to fell you about.

LM: Well, I'll fell you what. I'd be interested in. When you began this. What narrative did you have? Did you have the full-blown narrative when you began this project?

BL: Can I ask a question that goes back a little bit before that? You have been doing work with non-narrative video, haven't you?

DB: So, it wasn't about ritual reality, it was more about something that was somehow important in probably a way a lot of people have been talking about sort of unconsciously. Because I was

²⁶Although some readers may assume that Blair is making a punning reference here to "Aswan" (site of repeated colonialist interventions and hence related to *Wax*'s anti-colonialist slant.), it's far more like that Blair is alluding here to the line in *Wax* where Hive-Maker observes that, "The bees swarmed to the attack." This line is spoken just as Abbasid is about to meet his Maker (in fact, he doesn't merely meet but actually *becomes* Jacob Hive-Maker, the two of them doubling in preparation for the next stage of doubling that results in the X shaped Siamese Twins who are joined together by murder. See Paul Blair reference in note #14.

²⁷This chance encounter with Esperanto is yet another key element in the interlocking series of mysterious associations (bees-language-television-radar-artificial intelligence-artificial language) that seem to seek Blair out in order that they might find, in *Wax*, a new "home" (or hive) to "nest" in comfortably.

²⁸Cf. the analogous transformation and rebirth experienced by Jacob in *Wax* which culminates in his exclamation, "There I was born again."

interested . . . There were probably a lot of things in that period that did lead into all the interest in virtual reality and the people already talking about, I mean, *Max Headroom* had already happened and people were already talking about Reagan and all that stuff.

SB: Bored [Bard?] Reyard was being translated at that time.

DB: Right.

BL: The books were coming out.

SB: Bored Reyard had already been translated.

SB: Right. So, I mean, we're talking about from the early 80's.

DB: I did read *Stimulations* pretty easy, because *Stimulations* was great. It was a really good read because it was poetic. It was, like, the sort of thing that if in 77, 78 or 79, I'd been able to read that while I was trying to understand Pynchon, I would have just died and gone to haven.²⁹ Because there it was explained. You know, all the things that Pynchon was talking about were just right there. Where is it? There it is. That's what really what all that postmodernism stuff is all about. That was like an explication of all of that. So, basically, it would go back to talk about it in Pynchonian terms. Then, when you're talking about imminence and transcendence, then you can pretty much clearly see that context or removal from the body [and Pynchon knows ?] all those things about the body, melanin cells and reagents.

SB: So, no intentionality, but certainly you see your thinking as being part of this whole range of thought that was going on in the early 80's?

DB: It's like being in the [sa~va?]-not that I've ever been there. But you're trying to understand certain texts. That's what I was trying to do. Other people were in the same boat and, by the mid-eighties, enough people were trying to figure out the same things that there was a lot more to read about [?].

LM: [?] ?

BL: The question I was going to ask you is . . . You were talking about trying to fit a lot of this into a narrative which was guiding some of your research. When did you decide that you wanted to work in narrative because the work that you're describing was psychedelic, voodoo work [?] The things that you were looking at were [seemingly ?] non-narrative?

DB: I don't mean to overemphasize Pynchon³⁰ because it's not like the book was in the bathroom, but it was [?]. All that stuff had its most immediate effect in visual media and, of course, it was just unfortunate that there was no visual media that actually [?] that actually showed any of that. So the closet you could do would go to

BL: Showed any of what [?] ?

DB: Showed metamorphoses, transformation, and grotesquerie quickly, the way you can in words. There were no movies in that [sense ?]. You couldn't make a movie. Nobody could even imagine how to make a movie of *The Drying of Lot 49* for Christ's sake, or even real SF movies. The sort of SF movies that you would see were just like if you'd taken those [?] like an ass³¹ [?] double science fiction thing, where one novel half the book's thickness is in front, and a second, upside-down, takes up the

²⁹ In *Wax* Blair's alter ego, Hive-Maker, *does die* but goes not to "haven" but to Pluto, the land of the dead, where he is "born again" (thank you, Jesus!) as a human smart bomb.

³⁰It is perhaps worth noting that the subject of Blair's undergraduate thesis was the role of the grotesque in Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*. See also footnote #12.

³¹ Blair's Rube Goldbergesques description makes it difficult to tell for certain, but he apparent is referring to the "Ace" science fiction paperback series .

back half. You rip it in half, keep the back novel, tear that in half, rotate the back half and glue it on, so now you have an Ass single. Repeated several times, and you have , in one of the back sections, the typical plot of a mainstream SF movie, you'd get, like, short sub-stories³² and, of course, then when you **[explode? Explore?] the narrative on its own terms ?** . . .

LM: What about Burroughs, was he somebody that you . . . ?

DB: Burroughs was also scary at the time because **[it was such explicit ?]**³³. I read some of it and I was really off-put by it and so I didn't read very much more.

LM: Did that change? [?]

DB: No, it didn't change. I'd like to have the time to read some of the stuff in the early 70's, middle 60's. That's the stuff that I guess is the most interesting. But the thing about the library was that I was really inspired. I wanted to make fiction and the idea that I'd picked up was that you'd go and you could work it up and you work it up out of all sorts of . . . You'd patch it together and out of discoveries that you make and the big thing about *Wax* is that I really discovered this. There was a really great movie last spring called *The Architecture of Doom*, which is about the aesthetics of [?] and the whole thing about image processed narrative . . . It was really, like, a really grotesque description of the artist, creating the world and one of the things that I discovered, that is really sort of a sub-text, and many people have discovered this, but it was really a sub-text, I think, in Pynchon's work is that, sort of, the sad fact that the superneutral reality of, like, "you don't fuck with the occult, you don't fuck with them" is the big thing in Pynchon. You really discover that when you start imagining, you start trying to encyclopedize the world and imagine it [?] strange islands of negative space appear above you, all sorts of synchronicities appear and it was, like, some sort of peculiar . . .

³² For clarifies concerning the nature of this mysterious submarine motif, see Blair's comments in Appendix D beginning "It's like being in the submarine that the Jaredites came across the Atlantic in . . ."

³³ Blair's reference to how "scary" Burroughs seemed to him—along with his lack of familiarity with his work—might initially seem to make his decision to have Burroughs appear in a cameo role in *Wax* seem peculiar (Blair uses a re-processed photograph of Burroughs to represent James Hive-Maker, Jacob's grandfather). Given Blair's uneasiness about Burroughs, however, it is appropriate that the role Burroughs' image plays in the film is that of the elder Hive-Maker, the jealous bee-keeper whose murder of Zoltan Abbasid eventually results in Hive-Maker bee-coming a weapon of destruction during the Persian Gulf War. Actually, just a few moments later, Blair's admission that he once shot Burroughs during a visit to Lawrence, Kansas over a dispute about *Wax*'s plot appears to indicate that, as with so many other incidents in the film, the murder that takes place in *Wax* may be a mirror-reflection of an actual occurrence. Blair's startling admission about having once shot Burroughs (somewhat garbled but delivered in the same deadpan delivery used by Hive-Maker in making equally startling pronouncements) occurs during the following Kafka-esque exchange regarding *Wax*'s background:

DB: Hive-Maker is working in the stimulators[?]. The army's researching these bees in the Garden of Eden in Iraq. He goes and works for them. He volunteers to be shrunk to bee size and is helicoptered to Iraq and to the hive, which I showed this to Burroughs, which is like [?] and Burroughs is like this, "No, no, I wouldn't do *that!*" [??] He rejected the shrinking of the [?] ? Oh, I don't know. Burroughs, well. Burroughs [?]. Burroughs really liked it. He was, like, really pleased. [?] came and showed it to him [?] when we went out.

BL: Who's we? ?

DB: Well, this River City Reunion thing in 87. We were doing a documentary. We wanted to shoot him [?] In the afternoon we were going to go to dinner. He and the boyfriend of [?] his secretary and so I'm standing in the front dawn with Burroughs while everybody else [?] and he's got a stick and there's a cat [?] "Ah, kitty," he starts talking about the cat and I said, "Gee, Mr. Burroughs," [essentially like that, "have you read Thomas Pynchon?" ?] "Have you ever met Thomas Pynchon?" He said, "No, no." [?] "I always thought that you two might have something in common. I thought that the reason that nobody ever saw Pynchon is that he killed somebody and went on the ham." And then Burroughs goes, "No, no." And he takes the stick and he starts **hitting the [?]**

SB: I'm sorry. How did you come to show it to Burroughs when he was someone whose writing was not very important to you? ?

DB: Oh, because he was available [?] I was interested in the Garden of Eden [?] So I shot him. I didn't have much access to him, but I just shot him [?] so those characters in the book.

Anyway, I don't know [?] I sort of started to learn that technique, the [hysteriography ?], the working it up of his fiction. I went and I tried to do that and then I discovered that Pynchon had actually meant, what it meant to do that, the hysteria-making [?] the conjunction between the two of them. Not that it gives any, [an archivist has ?] any more power than the individual voter, but just how strange volition is and how it works. And the intersection between individual and cultural volition is really much stronger than we really imagine, just because it's synchronicity and things like that.

[End Window 4]

Window #5: All Automatic Editing. "Yahweh, we are wax. No-say toko a guy yah-wah we-o." (for William S. Burroughs)

What will this babblers say?

--Acts, xvii, 18.

DB: I was doing, do do cut-oops. I'd heard about cut-oops.

BL: Automatic editing?

DB: Yeah. Anyway, all that stuff was subsumed. I would do the automatic editing and then I would name it and write the story to it, so there was a thing I did in 81, 82, which was called "What is Wax?" and was about the Nazi candles, Nazi [ribbons ?] of human flesh [?] It's all thematic

LM: Lamps shades. [?]

DB: No, no lampshades, all automatic editing, which was . . . It's about twelve or fifteen minutes long and with a story, which was more like ["Yahweh, we are wax. No-say toko a guy yah-wah we-o" ?] It's like a schizophrenic, a very sad sort of performance story, a very abstrict peace, with the images being described on occasion or being just paralleled by a text. In 84 I finally managed to finish a couple pieces, a couple short pieces, that [you guys have never seen ?]. The Charlemagne filming, which was like a rhyming dictionary-poem that was shot sort of MTV style. And I had an opportunity to have a show in New York and I decided I'd cut down these three fifteen minute things I had to three minutes, which I [?] "Note in the Box," which was . . . You'll see it someday. And so I started to cut this thing called *Wax* down to three minutes and I decided I'm going to go to the library again. This is my chance to go to the library. I wanted to learn something about bees for this, you know, to put some more stuff in it and I started to cut it down. I couldn't quite cut it down like the other one, it didn't make sense, I had to add material to it, so I went to the library and you open up the book [of the photograph of the cards ?] and I read down, found all the books that were interesting, and one of them was *Reminiscences of* [?] [Azi-Abishadi ?], which was this book. This is where the story starts to get interesting. These are the background stories I'd promised I'd tell you. [End Window 5]

Window #6: We're in the Door: Bees, television, artificial language, and a Big Box, Pointed at a Guy with a Comb (Dedicated to the memory of Samuel Beckett)

LM: So. Okay: the bee book with the two front-pieces in it, the visual images, and reading the bee book, a narrative . . .

CB: Well, no, you didn't hear the second image.

SB: You haven't finished the story of the book, the other two . . .

DB: If you can let me tell this story--and this is one of those stories I wanted to tell you--this is a pretty good descriptive of the way the tape evolved into the real world. I never finished the thing

about the monk and the monkey monk. That's a great story, but [?] into the book. I'll tell you the monk story later. So, the second frontispiece is a photograph, you know, the first one I described would be Esperanto. The second frontispiece is a photograph of this guy with a thing over his head, with a big box, pointed at a guy holding a comb and it says, "The world's first television broadcast of bee-keeping, 1939, Alexandria Gardens." So, I go, "Wow!" That was exactly what I was looking for: television, bees, and artificial language. All them of them were there.

BL: Now, [?].

DB: I guess so. These are the demonstrations for the high-definition television of the time. Alexandria Gardens [?] There was a nature show that they had on those test broadcasts, actually, I think, they were on the air at that time.

LM: [?] What's the connection here? A kind story did you see? You say, "Oh great, I've got artificial language, bees, and television," but . . .

DB: I've got all my characters too, now this is all part [?].

LM: Alright, I'm just trying to figure out how . . . That doesn't necessarily create a narrative.

SB: [?~!

DB: But this is true. But this isn't what I was looking for. And then . . . Now we're in the door. I find J. C. Beemason, a page photo of a bald man, really tough-looking. J. C. Beemason . . .

LM: Beemason? Beemason?

DB: Yes. "Pioneer of Bee Cinematography."

LM: This is really in the book? This is in that *same book*?

SB: "*Pioneer of Bee Cinematography*"?

LM: This is a *photo* in that *same bee book*?

[End Window 6--Note: for the end of the transcript, see Epilogue]

APPENDICES, ASTERISKS, AFTERWORD(S), AN EPILOGUE

Electronic text is the first text in which the elements of meaning, of structures, and of visual display are fundamentally unstable. Unlike the printing press, or the medieval codex, the computer does not require that any aspect of writing be determined in advance for the whole life of a text. This restlessness is inherent in a technology that records information by collecting for fractions of a second evanescent electrons at tiny junctions of silicon and metal. All information, all data, in the computer world is a kind of controlled movement, and so the natural inclination of computer writing is to change.

--J. D. Bolter, *Writing Space: The Computer in the History of Literacy*

APPENDIX A. This not the Beginning First. Where the Words Are Coming From (Code-Retrieval Methods Employed in this Sign Processed Critical Narrative)

A1.IN THE GARDEN, IN THE BEGINNING, BEFORE THE FALL

There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

--*Ecclesiastics*, i, 11.

. . . nothing is ever lost . . . everything can be retrieved . . . a lifetime is not linear but an instant.

--Penelope Lively, *Moon Tiger*.

The interview material presented in the main body of this text (i.e., in Windows #1-6) consists of sampled excerpts of a computer-scanned version of a typed transcription derived from an audio version of a videotaped interview with David Blair (hereafter, "DB") conducted by three academic specialists in SF, SF film and postmodernism: Larry McCaffery ("LM"), Scott Bukatman (SB), and Brooks Landon (BL). The "live" interview had been conducted in San Francisco in our hotel's modest garden³⁴ during the 5-7 November 1992 "Cybernarrative & Postfuturism Festival" organized by LM for the New Langston Arts Reading and Lecture Series.

AII. THE BAD "NEWS": THE RANDOM QUALITY IS ESSENTIAL³⁵

The root of *news* is *new*. *New* is what is happening now, not what is being repeated.
--O.B. Hardinson, Jr., *Disappearing Through the Skylight*.

Due to the poor sound quality of the audio tape version of the interview, the original transcript (a typed version prepared by Kirk Peterson, a graduate student at San Diego State University) contained frequent gaps, as well as numerous instances where Peterson could only guess at certain words, phrases, and sentences that were garbled or inaudible. To indicate problematic areas, Peterson placed bold-faced brackets around ambiguous words or phrases followed by a question mark [**like this?**] and bracketed ellipses and question marks around portions of the text that he found completely unintelligible (e.g., [?] and [. . .]).

A variety of factors contributed to the transcriber's difficulties in precisely "capturing" or recreating in written form the words spoken in the original conversation--including the fact that Blair was sitting a bit out of the optimal audio range of the video camera McCaffery used to record the interview. Other significant sources of distortion and "noise" in the audio version (Cage would call it music, but *noise* is the appropriate term here) included: 1.) wind gusts (for technical reasons I can't explain, the mike on my 8 mm. video camera greatly magnifies the sound of air or breathing while slightly muffling spoken words); 2.) the myriad street sounds that produce the cacophony (or symphony) that is always playing in the airwaves of any big city; 3.) "background" remarks, asides, and conversations among the participants that obscured or entirely drowned out portions of the interview proper, including personal remarks, anecdotes, and other obvious irrelevancies (e.g., LM to SB, "Hey, Scott do you want another one of these beers?"); 4.) related background interference created when friends and other Festival participants arrived and joined the participants in the garden--arrivals including Kathy Acker, Takayuki Tatsumi and Mari, and (perhaps the most significant source of "interference") Bruce Sterling. Further hampering the accurate decoding of speech into printed word was the transcriber's relative unfamiliarity with the names, terms, and concepts being discussed in the interview. The process of having Peterson's typed transcript scanned (or "read") by a computer and then downloaded as a file onto a floppy disc apparently produced other slight discrepancies between the interview text appearing in Windows 1-4 and the "original" conversation..

AIII. THE GOOD NEWS: SUCH AN EXPERIENCE IS NOT BEYOND EXPRESSION

³⁴ Cf. I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley.
--*Song of Solomon*, v. 1.

³⁵ See O. B. Hardinson, Jr.'s comments, "The random quality of the front page of a modern newspaper is not accidental but essential." In *Disappearing Through the Skylight: Culture and Technology in the 20th Century*. N.Y.: Viking, 1989, p 207.

The reader always encounters a virtual image of the stored text and not the original itself.

--George P. Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*

In preparing this interview have made every effort to be as faithful to Peterson's transcription as possible. I have therefore retained not only all his idiosyncrasies of grammar, punctuation and typography (his use of brackets, for example) but his "misspelling's" and apparent transcription "errors," as well. To distinguish between his use of brackets and my own bracketed remarks, I have highlighted all of Petersen's in bold [**like this**] or [?]. Ellipses not bracketed and placed in bold retain their familiar usage (i.e., speaker pausing).

Rather than laboring over the inevitably fruitless task of creating a "direct" transcription of the "original" interview, I have instead decided to create a critical text via a process which models the analogous "processed narrative" principles used by Blair in creating *Wax*. (for Blair's summary of "processed narrative" works, see Appendix B). Among other things, then, I decided to develop my own critical "narrative" by simply letting myself stay open to whatever "materials" of style or content happen to be produced by the interview "process" itself—which included not only the actual "live" conversation but the subsequent series of digitalized, technological transformations of this exchange. Thus, rather than having a pre-set "thesis" or set of subjects that I decided I wished to develop beforehand, or pledging allegiance to the principles of accuracy and fidelity-to-the-original which are commonly associated with the interview form, "Interview Ms. Found in a Floppy Disc" evolved out of aesthetic principles akin to those of collage, digression, and cut-up, fold-in methods. Although the "real interview" (and the formal principles associated with printed versions of this interview), along with Blair's film, provides a loose overall sense of aesthetic and thematic parameters for my text, I allowed the interview process itself—all those personal and technical processes involved in the successive stages whereby the "raw materials" from an original conversation (our words, gestures, and other codes used to exchange "meanings" and "ideas") are mechanically reproduced or "captured," transformed into electronic impulses and digital signals, "stored" until they will be subsequently "retrieved" (again via technological means). It will probably be immediately apparent to most readers that this series of mechanical "translations" has inevitably resulted in a certain amount of "degradation" of the "original." But while these seeming "mistranslations" may initially seem frustrated to some readers, my own sense is that these minor irritations are more than balanced by the fact that these "degradations" actually wind up giving "new life" to this material, which otherwise would have been subjected to the deathly imprisonment of a mimetic retrieval. In the end, then, the interview text that appears here has emerged from the alchemical process whereby dross of "reality"—having been filtered through a network of video cameras and audio recorders, typewriters, computer scanners, computer software, fax machines, telephone conversations, distractions, seeming irrelevancies, digressions, chance-encounters, and other happy accidents—is turned into the textual "gold" of Windows 1-5. Eureka!

AIV. RIDING ON BROKEN FRAGMENTS OF TIME: WHY INTERVIEW FRAGMENTS AND NOT THE COMPLETE INTERVIEW?

The movement from manuscript to print and then to hypertext appears one of increasing fragmentation.

--George P. Landow, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*.

Since readers may legitimately question why I have chosen to present these somewhat garbled fragments* of the unedited interview materials--rather than a complete version of one of the subsequent edited versions, a brief clarification is in order. My decision was based on my conviction that these "garbed" excerpts--while admittedly an incomplete second or third generation "copy" of the original conversation and hence an "earlier," "less" refined" and no doubt less "inaccurate" text than the more polished, edited version--is actually a far more preferable version because it is *less* altered, less transformed, and hence ultimately more mimetic, more *real* than a edited version, and hence will model more accurately the actual conditions of the interview. More importantly, the manner in which this "inaccurate" version now unfolds as a hallucinatory, surrealist narrative, full of poetic associations and unanticipated connections provides a useful method to model the mysterious, aesthetic and intellectual operations that produced David Blair's remarkable film *Wax*. Thus, the "errors" or "non-sequiturs" in this interview, the "misunderstandings," the non-temporal, dream-like, and stream-of-consciousness associations characterizing the exchanges, and so forth, have been meticulously preserved intentionally--as have the various other "miss-readings" or "mistranslations" that occurred in subsequent stages of "de-coding's" and filterings. SAQ readers interested in comparing the SAQ version with a re-processed (i.e., hyperreal) version that has been transformed, changed, edited, re-worked, fictionalized, clarified, etc., should compare the text included in Window #4 with the "lightly edited" version of the same portion of the conversation which I've included here as Appendix C. For now, I will leave my readers to consider the many ironies involved in the processes that will eventually make hyperreal version be accepted as "official."

APPENDIX B: "IMAGE PROCESSED (CYBER)-NARRATIVE"

In response to my request, Blair was kind enough to prepare the following statement regarding the aesthetic principles guiding his creation of *Wax*:

Wax is an image processed narrative . . . meaning both the images and narrative are processed. " Years ago, when we went to the moon, processing meant turning knobs (here we think about pi: 3.141526, the mysterious dog-shaped number that helps describe the space of the turning knob) to alter an analogue signal . . . though during the period between the hard and soft landings on the moon, this altered to become image-processing, a new time/space regime where the picture was divided up into little cells . . . there simple little grammars rewrote that pic bit by bit, using the machine of machines, AKA nowadays your watch, or Larry McCaffery's PowerBook 100 . . . the result being that we could better see what had been in those photos all along. Soft moon was followed by the time of the game of LIFE, AKA the Zone of cellular automata, where again local little grammars, displayed on either paper or from the inside of air-evacuated tubes, created self-reproducing flatland squiggles that might or might not be alive . . . today, apparently, image processing and LIFE and combined to give us image processed synthesis, where one plays pi to create synthetic images of a timeless zone (a voxel of monads . . . pixels

* Rather than evoking the over-used (and ultimately misleading and ambiguous) references that would be expected at this point ("These are fragments I have shorn against my ruins . . . fragments are the only form I trust," etc.) I will cite Patricia Hill Collins remarks to help establish my point: "Partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard" (cited by Stephen Pfohl in *death at the parasite cafe: Social Science (Fictions) and the Postmodern* (N.Y.: St. Martin's, 1992), p. 237.

trying to live in 3-D space), source of a world embedded in our own . . . Anyway, the narrative is processed also. (from a letter dated 1/28/93)

APPENDIX C: BLAIR LITE(LY) EDITED (BY LM)--WINDOW #4

Nothing here but the recordings--in another country.

--William S. Burroughs, *Nova Express*

SB: Obviously you made a video, as opposed to a virtual reality environment; but within the video, you stress the concept of the virtual reality environment over and over, and approach it in a lot of different ways.

DB: Yes, but keep in mind that back in '85 when I started *Wax*, there was no virtual reality--at least no term for it. People didn't know about the realism of flight simulation environments. So when I got these real-time graphics from the contractor I'd actually show people these things and no body had ever seen anything like it.

LM: How did you get access to those.?

DB: That's another one of those anecdotes.

LM: Okay, David, that's it!* I've *had it* with these goddam anecdotes!!! I know they all supposed to relate to how *Wax* got made, but nobody is going to follow any of this. I mean, people reading this SAQ issue don't want to hear about VR, not some weird anecdote about Esperanto and diving board instruction movies played backwards. Just *shut the fuck up* about them and talk only about what I want you to talk about, GET IT? [Long silence]. Okay, that's better. Now, then: did you already have a full-blown narrative when you began *Wax*? Any narrative at all? Or had it begun from something more abstract, like a metaphor or whatever . . .

SB: Okay, McCaffery, you've been bullying writers and collaborators for nearly twenty years now, and it's finally time somebody stood up and told YOU--that's right, YOU, MOTHERFUCKER!!! I MEAN, WE'RE ALL FED UP TO HERE WITH YOU ALWAYS WANTING TO CONTROL EVERYTHING, CHOOSING THE TOPICS, EVEN PUTTING WORDS IN OUR MOUTHS.

BL: YEAH, MR. INTERROGATOR. Like maybe I don't fancy the banalities you been shoving in my mouth all afternoon, if you catch my drift?.

LM: LOOK, ASSHOLES, IF THAT'S THE CASE, THEN I PUT THE WORDS YOU JUST SPOKE IN YOUR MOUTHS. ** NOW WHY WOULD I DO THAT, HUH?

SB, BL, DB--all heard to be mumbling assorted phrases like, "Gee, no," and "I never thought about that!" and, "Maybe I was jumping to conclusions," etc. Eventually a lone voice emerges out of the babble. It is DB's:

DB: Okay, so let's just finish my reply to what you've been asking about in terms of *Wax*'s evolution. When I started out, *Wax* wasn't about virtual reality; it was about something important that in ways people have been talking and thinking about unconsciously. There were a lot of things people were already talking about in that period that led into all the interest in virtual reality. *Max Headroom* had

* Readers paying attention to the tenor and texture of the conversation up to the point will probably suspect that the next several lines of alleged "conversation" among the participants were a pure fabrication on my part--perhaps introduced, it might be assumed, as a kind of wake-up-call to my collaborators, whose attentions might have wandered from the task at hand (the alchemical task of transforming waste into gold" which that Patti Smith has described (in 'the salvation of rock') "as "the oldest preoccupation of man."*

** The reference is to *Isaiah* li, 16: "I have put my words in thy mouth."

already happened, for example . . . and people were already developing analogies with Reagan and all that stuff.

SB: And Baudrillard and a lot of other important critical books were just appearing in translation at that time.

DB: Right. Actually Baudrillard had already been translated. I read *Simulations* pretty early and found it to be a really good read because it was so poetic. Had I been able to read it back in '77, '78 or '79 while I was trying to understand Pynchon, I would have just died because basically there it all was explained. All the things that Pynchon was talking about--imminence and transcendence, the removal from the body and all that other stuff about the body, melanin cells and reagents--were just right there in *Simulations*, only placed into a different context. It was like an explication of all of that postmodern stuff, except Baudrillard would go back to talk about it in Pynchonian terms.

BL: So, without imputing intentionality to all this, you certainly did see your thinking as being part of this whole range of postmodernist thought and interrogations that were going on in the early-to-mid 80's?

DB: (not that I ever was there). Essentially what I was trying to do during this period was to understand certain texts. By the mid-eighties, other people were in the same boat. We were all trying to figure out the same things, and suddenly it seemed like there was a lot more to read about this.

SB: You were talking about trying to fit a lot of this into a narrative which was guiding some of your research. When did you decide that you wanted to work in *narrative* form. I mean, the earlier work you were describing sounds like seemingly non-narrative psychedelic video work.

DB: But, again, Pynchon was the main model I was working from because he had found a way to combine psychedelic visual materials and narrative. I don't mean to overemphasize Pynchon-- it's not like the book was in the bathroom (although it was)--all that stuff was presented in terms of visual media in the novel, and it had its most immediate effect in visual media. The unfortunate thing was, of course, that there was no visual media that was actually showing any of that.

SB: Showed any of what?

DB: Showed metamorphoses, transformation, grotesquerie *quickly*, the way you can in words. There were no movies or videos that operated in that mode. Nobody could even imagine how to make a movie of *The Crying of Lot 49* for Christ's sake! Or even real SF movies. The SF movies that you would see were just like if you'd taken those in the Ace-Double paperback series, and then you'd taken it again, and then you'd taken it again, you'd wind up with short sub-stories; but, of course, then when you explore the actual narrative on its own terms, well, it was pretty thin.

APPENDIX D. LISTING OF SOME THREADS OF CONNECTION AMONG THE SUBJECTS, TROPES, METAPHORS, MOTIFS, THEMES, AND ALLUSIONS FOUND IN TWO INTERVIEW WINDOWS

". . . it was in the context of turning this [all these disparate facts] into narrative. That was the whole point."

David Blair, in Window #2

(Relating to) WINDOW #1: Cain and Abel as early version of "Siamese Twins" linked eternally by vengeance and murder; association of death, Pluto, the Moon, the military/Garden of Eden, Civil War and the later succession of wars occurring in 20th century; Dinsmore's concrete Garden-of-Eden as amusement part anticipates the mass marketing and commodification of abstractions, images, values and "inner" emotions; Dinsmore's mummification as part of pattern of grotesque images (also

denaturing of the body concept) and literalizes the way that Hive-Maker is “dead” for his wife once he becomes drawn to the bees; Biblical tropes, twins/doublings/multiple personalities (Hive-Maker’s assumption of multiple identities--“I was Zolton Abbassid,” etc.--paralleling Blair’s “I was Lawrence” which, via the Lawrence of Arabia overtones, also draws into orbit the Middle East, colonialism, military tactics, the White Man’s burden; Lawrence KS./William S. Burroughs connection, and the hints of the Burroughs/Blair Bad Blood which results in yet another murder of symbolic artist brothers (note the recurrence of words beginning with “B” in these sequence, another display of reflexive, meta-cinematics which foreground the primal semiotic or alphabetical code which “constructs” the identity and “meaning” of all elements in this film, B/Bee/To be/B-Movie).

(Relating to) WINDOW 2: 1950s methods of information storage and retrieval methods, with specific attention to words and other semiotic codes stored in libraries, synchronistic connections across time and space; Bee-Keeping; Bee-reforming; Bee Kingdom League; the world-as-book (or text) motif (Borges, the Kabala); the career of Akbed Zakki Abu Shadi (Egyptian-born British bee reformer), used by Blair as model for Zoltan Abbassid in Wax); “ghosts” and “ghost writers” (Abashadi’s “life” transformed into semiotic codes by his secretary and then published in a book; denaturing of the body, the grotesque and its manifestations in the body (Abashadi wounded who had been wounded in W.W.I); war motif (in preparation for Wax’s culminating Persian Gulf War episode, the omnipresence of military systems involvement in even the unlikely technologies (Bee-Keeping as Repatriation Option for Wounded Veterans); Bee Kingdom, the Afterworld (Kingdom Come--which also related to flying saucer phenomenon via “Majestic”--“heavenly” but also code word for The Roswell Incident; see ref. by Blair [garbled in the transcript] early in Window 3; relating to others as objects or commodities (as Hive-Maker is) paralleled by larger colonialism motif; in this case, the bees and honey—the raw materials—originated in the Middle-East and are being contested by England and the other European nations who had recently waged a far more costly and literal “war”; by extension this struggle foreshadows both W.W.II (where Hitler’s decision to use the development of TV capable of providing the technological-base for radar paid off handsomely); as Hitler’s “ghost” vies with the globe-trotting Elvis image to see who is most often sighted and talked about during the 1991 “present” of the film, fascism’s power and influence remain unchecked (attentive viewers may notice that Blair has altered the number appearing in the dollar bill image appearing at the very conclusion of Wax as Hive-Maker says that he believes his brothers’ promise about their not allowing any more wars for the next 1000 years (1000 years being the confidently predicted length of rein for the Third Reich). The “television war” fought by England and Germany in the 30s anticipates the even more furious war between the Nazi’s and Allies to see who could first develop nuclear weapons in the 40s; the first plutonium bomb is set off on July 16, 1945, the same day as Hive-Maker’s birth; in order to deliver these weapons, which are soon mass produced, military specialists in video and cinemas are concurrently developing a nuclear weaponry “ad campaign” that eases Americans worries by replacing the truth with a seers of soothing, infinitely reproducible images and slogans; image, weaponry, deception, simulation, and video-technology will all play key roles in the Gulf War that Hive-Maker is launched into; the relationships among artificial language, artificial intelligence, VR, military weapons; the parallel and ongoing colonial struggles among the post W.W.I and W.W.II England, US., Germany and Middle Eastern countries used as a literal and symbolic “bridge” or means of access through which the dead of the past can swarm into Hive-Maker’s present and vengefully attack the living (thus repeating the pattern originally established by the Biblical Cain and Abel), flight simulation, the hive (so similar to a computer chip in appearance), bee language, the

Tower of Babel, Esperanto, colonialism, and military operations generally; proximity and associations established for bee scientists, war, Middle east, the United Nations, Esperanto.

AFTERWORD(S): Correspondence Between Mark Dery (Guest Editor of *South Atlantic Quarterly's* special "Cyber-Culture" issue) and Larry McCaffery regarding Dery's response to and eventually rejection of McCaffery's "Interview Ms. Found in a Floppy Disc" for inclusion in his special issue

#1. Computer scanned version of fax sent by Dery to McCaffery following Dery's receipt of McCaffery's fax of the first two pages of "Ms. Found in a Floppy Disc" manuscript:

17 February 1993

Larry McCaffery:

Thanks much for the useful pointers on finding a trade paperback out of Duke University.

Shortly after we spoke, I swung the commercial envelope to which you faxed a two-page excerpt from our SAQ contribution. The reason the envelope had not contacted me was evident at a glance: My name and home phone did not appear at the top of the fax. In the future, please make certain to include them; otherwise, they won't reach me.

While I should probably wait until I receive the hardcopy you are FedExing tomorrow, a cursory glance at your fax revealed a detail that demands immediate attention: please delete all "Dracketed question marks" from our text. While I remain openminded about our proposed attempt to create a literary analog to WAX's nonlinear dynamic, I see no need to be "faithful to Aoberts' transcription."

Looking forward with eagerness to receive receipt of our essay,

M. Dery

#2. Computer Scanned version of fax sent by Dery to McCaffery explaining Dery's decision to reject "Interview Ms. Found in a Floppy Disc" for the SAQ special issue.

18 February 1993

I'm not entirely certain that you're receiving these faxes, since several requests I made in past transmissions seem to have been disregarded.

Nonetheless, here are my thoughts on "Interview Ms. Found in a Floppy Disc":

1. Not the risk of sounding picayune, I fail to understand why two copies of the same manuscript had to be FedEx'd to me at the expense of the SAQ. Moreover, you sent a third at your own expense. By all

appearances, they are identical; one would have sufficed. You Mention, in a note scrawled on the earliest, that wanted to yet one to Me posthaste. I would have preferred to wait for a single, copyedited, final draft.

Z. You asked, in one phone Message, if ZO pages rather than 15 would be acceptable, and I replied by fax that 15 would be preferable. Euen so, I received 19. This is hardly catastrophic, naturally, but I was chagrined to note that you disregarded my specific directive that you NOT pursue your calamitous plan to preserve the misspellings, gaps, garbled passages, and ungrammatical constructions that resulted from "the poor sound quality of the audiotape version of the interview" transcribed by a graduate student. Consequently, the text is a daunting gorse patch of solecisms and orthographic errors that makes the reader's task as wearying as it is unrewarding.

3. The Q&A is perhaps the most difficult form to bring off. Journalists are well aware that the genre is too often the refuge of capable writers stretched thin by other commitments. At its best, the Q&A is a crackling exchange between nimble wits, edited to enhance the Wimbledon-like excitement of rapid-fire intellectual volleys. But then, you know this, having produced across the Wounded Galaxies, which makes the desultory, Maundering nature of the discussion between yourself, Brooks Landon, Scott BukdtMan, and David Blair all the more disappointing. There seems to be very little data compression here.

4. In addition to the purposeless, frustrating errors intentionally included, in brackets, throughout the text, there are innumerable unintentional errors--misspellings, unorthodox punctuation--that suggest that the essay was never proofread. This is entirely unacceptable.

5. Finally, the text is larded with arcane references that merely serve to make the entire essay impenetrable to the uninitiated. What, for example, is the connection, in Appendix B, between your fabricated exclamation "I put the words you just spoke in your mouths" and a similar line in the Old Testament, beyond the obvious, superficial correlation? Why must the hotel Garblein which the interview was conducted be cross-referenced, in the appendices, with a line from the Song of Solomon? While there is little doubt that "Wax" is fraught with Biblical symbolism, these references seem to serve no explicative purpose--at least none that I'm able to discern. The hell, too, in our initial discussions of possible approaches to David Blair's little-known, extremely underground work, I repeatedly stressed the importance of a detailed description of the film, augmented by a brief plot summary, in order to illuminate those who might not have seen this obscure film. Regrettably, the one-page introduction does neither; "Wax," a Gordian knot of a nouie, remains as recondite as ever. An unrelated afterthought: the faux diatribe appearing on page four of the appendices ("You, notherfucker," et al) is mortifying. Is it intended to be humorous?

It is of paramount importance that you understand that I have no problem (at least in theory) with your decision to use Hypertext as your architectural; TIME magazine, in its recent "Cyberpunk" cover story, and Mondo Z000: ~ User's Guide to the ~ew Edge (Harper Perennial, 1992) both attempt such an enulation. Like yourself, I am intimately acquainted with Joyce, Stein, Burroughs, Leyner, and other modernist and postmodernist attempts at nonlinear textuality and so am not put off by the notion. That notwithstanding, I find "Interview MS.," in the final analysis, unsuccessful in its attempt to simulate the cut-up, recombinant nature of post-utenbergian software such as Hypertext or avant-garde cinema such as Blair's. Rather, it fatigues the eye and frustrates the mind.

In conclusion, let me say that I regret that my verdict is not a happier one. My respect for your critical acuity, amply evidenced in Storming the Reality Studio and elsewhere, remains undimmed. Even so, I cannot let personal feelings interfere with my desire to produce a superb time essay collection. I have no doubt that you would act as I would if you were in my position, and can only hope that our professional relationship has not been irreparably damaged.

Yours,

M. Dery

cc. Emily White/Melissa Lentricchia, SAQ

#3. Copy of letter from McCaffery to Dery following receipt of Dery's fax (above) indicating he was not including "Interview Ms. Found in a Floppy Disc" in the SAQ issue.

Feb. 20, 1993

Yo, Mark,

Now that I've had a chance to look over your letter rejecting my SAQ "Interview MS. Found in a Floppy Disc" piece, I feel it deserves an extended response. I have, after all, spent a great deal of time and effort writing a piece which you commissioned and which I honestly feel is not only absolutely appropriate for your issue but also one of the very best things I've ever written. And now you've rejected it out of hand. I'm also disappointed for David Blair's sake, since I think *WAX* is a truly major work whose significance is only certain to grow as it is seen by more people. Having re-examined your letter several times, I also strongly suspect that there were other factors involved that distorted your sense of what this text was, what it was meant to be and do. I'll explain. What I'm hoping is that you will re-examine my piece--or perhaps get a second opinion (preferably from someone familiar with *Wax*, but this isn't essential).

It's obvious from everything you say in your note that either 1.) the ms. I sent you was a complete failure, or 2.) you basically didn't understand what I was trying to do here (the fault here could be either yours or mine), or 3.) something prevented you from understanding what I was doing that you very possibly would have understood ordinarily. I think it was #3--and in fact one way to put this is that your rejection letter indicates that you were, in a sense, reading what you took to be an entirely different document--namely, the hurriedly put-together interview, done in the midst of various over-commitments, that I thought I was going to have to turn in when I talked with you in early January. Well, "Int. Ms. Found" was NOT that piece. Although "Int Ms." had its origins with that odd "uncollected" file that I began to look at in New Mexico, once I began to see the possibilities of this piece, I wound up spending A LOT more time creating this "assemblage" or "sign processed critical narrative" than I would have in developing a more usual interview. So, just to set that record straight: what you got wasn't something I tossed off in the midst of doing other things. Quiet the contrary, I honestly feel that what I developed was a far more interesting AND appropriate method of discussing *WAX* and the key issues about the relationship among language/codes and reality,

originality and duplication, simulation, white noise, confusion, and so forth that are central not only to WAX but to cyber-culture as a whole.

These are also central, it seems to me, to the interview form itself--a form which has assumed an entirely different purpose during the rise of the Culture Industry, the proliferation of academic presses generally and of presses devoted to contemporary and postmodern scholarship specifically. So "Int Ms Found" is also meant to examine (and exhibit) aspects of the interview form itself. Given the three books of interviews I've already published, plus two more that are due out soon, I've had as many opportunities as anybody around to think about the interview as a form, as a discourse, and etc. Certainly I'm been aware from the outset of the point you raise in #3 about the difficulties of making the Q&A form be more than a mere transcription of Babel or banalities--and in fact, you may have seen some of the pieces I've published recently about this. For instance, in the interview with me (done by Lew Shiner) that appeared in the special INTERVIEW Issue of the MISSISSIPPI REVIEW I explained that my use of the Q&A was pretty obviously not done in service of mimesis--i.e., I don't want readers to assume that I have recreated an actual conversation (people don't talk like they do in any of my interviews, though I hope I am able to retain a sense of actual voices). Rather, I like the Q&A's economy of form, its dramatic possibilities (yes, Plato was indeed my main influence), and so on. The point is that all my published interviews are highly (HIGHLY) edited re-constructs--based on actual conversations, to be sure, but mainly using the original material as a springboard for later improvisation, editing, rearranging, splicing, etc etc.

I just never "collaborated" with the original material in quite this way before.

Among other things, "Int Ms" is meant to foreground the inevitable discrepancies between "reality" (actual conversation) and the "hyper-real" (whatever later version is published, there will always be successive stages of technology that are transforming the "original" in different ways). My intent was to exaggerate this process--with the "found material" I had being an especially dramatic (and in fact, HILARIOUS) example. But the "found material"--the ludicrous and amusing computer-scanned version of the transcription--turned out to present a lot of intriguing OTHER possibilities. Of course, there were some sections that were fairly coherent and relevant as is, but a lot of it was so garbled and surreal that it didn't directly seem to make sense at all; often when it does relate to WAX, it does so only by chance, or by the act of "reading" that a critic (or any reader) might bring to it, assuming s/he was actually combing through this junkyard (ala one of the 50s collage artists' work) trying to find bits of stories and information that, however distorted, could be reassembled in order to construct some *new* reality, and perhaps to "reflect" some prior state of affairs (in this case, certain key tropes and motifs in BLAIR's film). Hence the "window" and "mirror" imagery I introduce early on--my first epigraph following the title spells all this out pretty clearly, I think.

One of the reasons I feel certain your reading of "Int Ms" was prejudiced or distorted by what you thought you would be getting is that you apparently didn't ever pick up on the fact that the entire piece is meant to be, at least on one level, **funny**--a kind of Kinboteian or Borgesian spoof of the way academics are able to read "into" even random texts significant meanings and narrative patterns. A reader who's completely unaware that it's to be read this way, might wind up feeling some of the reactions you apparently did.

But, really, Mark, how could anyone NOT recognize the humor here--unless something had thrown them off track at the outset? What exactly was your reaction when you came to the solemn listing of "Opening Statements by Interview Participants" and found what you found there??? Or: what did you make of my claims (buried in one of the footnotes) that Blair had actually "shot" Burroughs"!!? There are dozens of other examples. I was frankly baffled by several of your remarks asking whether such-and-such was supposed to be humorous. These remarks made me realize that you were absolutely **not** reading the same piece I had sent you.

But the piece isn't meant to be ONLY a spoof or meta-interview commentary. This hypertextual collage/assemblage I created--this labyrinth of footnotes and cross references and anecdotes, many of them initiated by either misreadings on the part of the narrator (who despite the designation "Larry McCaffery" cannot be seen as being precisely "me"--hence the footnote following my name: "He is nowhere to be found except possible in the epilogue, etc.),"transcription errors" or "noise" in the "transmission"--all this material is relevant to WAX, its themes, its symbols, its view of history , and (maybe most significantly) its METHOD OF COMPOSITION (Blair's "sign processed narrative" concept--which I tried to develop an analogy for here).

Onward to some of your points.

1.)Since you risk opening your remarks with what might sound picayune, I'll just respond by saying I *didn't* send two copies of the same manuscript to you at SAQ's expense--only one of the versions (the last) was billed to SAQ, the others I paid for. And although the differences are relatively minor, the versions I sent are not, as you claim "by all appearances . . . identical." I sent these versions this way out of what I thought was consideration for the deadline pressures you seemed to be under. So I 1.) sent the first version (printed out on my home printer--which didn't have the correct type fonts I wanted to use) so you could have a chance to look it over and catch your breath, with a note saying a clean copy would be sent from San Diego the next day (remember I'm commuting to San Diego from the desert); 2.) sent the laser-printed copy to you, slightly revised, the next day; and then 3.) sent a final version (yes, this one paid for by the SAQ) the following day when I discovered some other changes that hadn't been entered.

Sorry for the confusion.

2.)As to my sending you 19 pages rather than 15, well, let's skip over this (obviously the length wasn't your problem). Then you go on to say that you were chagrined to note that I had "disregarded" your specific directive that I NOT pursue my "calamitous" plan to preserve the misspellings, gaps, etc. Mark, as I see it, here is where the real problem arises: you undoubtedly felt irritated that I had gone ahead and disregarded what you had instructed me to do--an irritation that probably affected your response to what I sent. But I had sent you only two pages of what was already a nearly completed ms.--a manuscript whose basic premise begins with the "garbled" interview text. Surely I wasn't expected to abandon my premise at this point--especially since you had only seen 2 pages of the text, and so you couldn't possibly have understood what I was up to (in fact, I was absolutely sure you'd find your own warnings about the need to delete all the bracket remarks (etc.) to be funny (having only those 2 pages, your suggestions were understandable). Perhaps I should have phoned you at that point to clarify what I was up to, but I simply felt confident that once you saw everything in context, you would appreciate how ESSENTIAL the "brackets" and "errors" and etc. were.

3.) After noting the difficulties involved in the Q&A form, you then refer to the "desultory, maundering nature of the discussions" I included. I quite disagree!!! In terms of this material's display of (to quote your letter) "Wimbledon-like excitement of rapid-fire intellectual volleys"--not to mention the range of subjects covered, the sheer audacity of the questions and replies (e.g., the very opening exchange: "Landon: The army actually made you move the Garbleof Eden? Blair: Yes, from Basra to Kansas...!!"), the puns and word play, the range of topics covered, the surprising details and textures introduced, the undeniably poetic and lyrical qualities that frequently emerge--*not to mention the ways this materials turns out to reveal key features of Blair's film and his highly original way of putting it together--* . . . well, I'll match this material on its own terms with any other similar amount of interview material you want to show me. [Of course, I'm saying this knowing how odd it is to be saying this, but I suspect that Burroughs could make the same kind of claims, for many of the same reasons, about the relevance and significance of sections of his own texts vis-a-vis what might be found in "straight" texts.]

4.) I'll pass over your reference to "the purposeless, frustrating errors intentionally included, in brackets" as being now no longer relevant; as to the "innumerable unintentional errors," I can only apologize for not having caught all of these. I did indeed proof read this piece, however, and found it rather insulting for you to suggest I didn't--again, I strongly suspect that you were saying this because you continued to assume I had sent you a piece of hastily thrown-together "purposeless, frustrating" junk that I couldn't even bother to proof read.

Wrong.

5.) Regarding your claim that my text "is larded with arcane references that merely serve to make the entire essay impenetrable"--again, it is possible for like minds to disagree and I (of course) disagree. I could proceed to explain the various effects and resonances and intertextualities I intended with each of these references--but that's like trying to explain the punch lines to a joke (a good analogy here . . .). I will say that some of these are meant to be startling, unexpected, and humorous (e.g., the Biblical citation for the obscene fabrication that you cite was meant to startle by changing the tone and context so unexpectedly, plus it suggests the "god-like" role that I have assumed in my earlier interviews in putting words into the mouths of authors--but it was *mainly* meant to be humorous, a kind of mocking of the academic's tendency to cite "lofty texts" in order to claim, by association, a lofty meaning). The "garden" citation--with its reference to "nuts" and "fruits"--is a multiple pun involving the seemingly "crazed" nature of the interview participants ("nuts"), sexual orientation (San Francisco's gay community), the Garbleof Eden that figures so prominently in the piece (with the Garbleof Eden story itself being used by me--as with Blair's WAX--as an ancient prefigurement of the separation of word and object, logos, the tower of Babel, etc. etc. etc.).

You also say in #5 that you don't feel my introduction effectively describes WAX or provides a plot summary. Again, all I can say is that I don't agree. Quite the contrary, I think the mosaic of materials introduced in various places in the ms. provides a very palpable sense of what they will experience in WAX. These materials include pp. 2-4 (my "straight summary" and my pastiche of Blair's own narrative (pointed out for readers in footnote #3 on p. 2), plus various other information I provide give readers in the footnotes [see pp.5-10]. Surely since you've seen the film yourself, you're aware of how IMMENSELY complex the actual "plot" (I don't like the term here, but . . .) is--and how unlikely any "straight" description would be in rendering it accurately or within context?

Finally, your assurance that you "have no problem" with my use of Hypertext as an architectonic here did not reassure due to the unfortunate examples you cited (TIME's "cyberpunk" issue and the MONDO USER's GUIDE). These were not exactly the models I was aspiring to.

So what have we here? I feel that your letter strongly indicates that your rejection of this piece was based on having read my ms. through biased "spectacles" that distorted what you had in front of you.

I therefore humbly request that you reconsider your rejection and give my ms. one more "fresh" reading. It might be best of all if you would allow someone else whose judgment you respect to read the piece and see what they think--Fred Jameson (if he would be willing to look at it) would be appropriate; so would Scott Bukatman (even though he's in the piece, I've not discussed it with him in detail and he has no vested interest in having it appear--in fact, quite the opposite! I do know that I feel that the time and energy I devoted to creating this piece which you commissioned at least warrant your giving it this further consideration.

Please let me know what your reaction is to this suggestion. I can be reached starting tomorrow (Wed 2/16) at my SDSU #'s (PHONE: 619-594-5441; FAX; 594-4998). Today, Tuesday, I am staying at a hotel in Calexico that doesn't have phone service.

Sincerely,

Larry McCaffery

cc. Emily White\Melissa Lentricchia, SAQ/ Scott Bukatman/David Blair/Brooks Landon.

#4. Computer Scanned version of fax sent by Dery to McCaffery following receipt of McCaffery's letter of 2-20.

Larry Mr. McCaffery

Your thoughtful fax, obviously deeply felt, prompted me to re-read "Interview with S. Foucault in a Floppy Disc". Regrettably, I remain unimpressed. I understand your premise but am nonplussed by the results. The positioning of concatenated sentences as a meta-interview in an attempt to concretize the mediated, nutable nature of postmodern literacy seems merely to reiterate ideas set forth by Baudrillard in "The Precession of Simulacra," and by a legion of Baudrillardians (the Kropotkins foremost among them). Postmodernist pronouncements regarding the increasingly unreal nature of the real are a received truth, at this point, and do not strike this reader as revelatory unless given a highly original spin.

Moreover, "Interview with S. Foucault" is explicated in footnotes, intended as a Pale Fire-style send-up of "the way academics are able to read 'into' even random texts significant themes and narrative patterns" as well as "the academic's tendency to cite lofty texts in order to claim, by association, a lofty meaning." I impress me as hopelessly oblique and hence unconvincing. You seem to believe that the fact that I do not find "Interview with S. Foucault" polytextual, and fabricated exchanges sidesplittingly indicates that I am afflicted with a constitutional inability to appreciate humor.

This is an inarguable proposition, since those with unpaired senses of humor are usually defined as those who laugh at one's jokes. Even so, I am constrained to point out, in my own defense, that your bafflement~ "I was frankly baffled by several of your remarks asking whether such-and-such was supposed to be humorous"---has little to do with my comments, since I never "asked" any such thing. I wonder aloud, at one point, if the utterly notifying knock-diatribes appearing on page four of the appendices ("You, notherfucker," et al) was supposed to be amusing, but my wonderment was entirely facetious.

There is, of course, a constellation of minor points of communication which you and I will never agree, given our schedules among them the purported impossibility of summarizing the nonlinear, non-linear plot of "Wax" and the extent to which you succeeded in your attempt at emulating Hypertext.

In all candor I feel entirely to blame for the time and effort you have spent on this endeavor. It was I, after all, who solicited your participation in this undertaking. I can only reaffirm my respect for your abilities as an anthropologist, essayist and interviewer, and offer this olive branch. I will pass our correspondence, together with the latest draft of "MS," on to Melissa Lentricchia. If she and Frank Lentricchia contend that I have misjudged your essay, and that it will indeed make a handsome addition to the issue, I will reinstate it without quibble. You may expect a response from them in the coming weeks.

With profound regrets,

M. Dery

#5. Computer scanned version of letter sent by Melissa Lentricchia (Managing Editor, *South Atlantic Quarterly*) confirming Dery's decision to reject "Interview Ms. Found in a Floppy Disc."

Feb. 24, 1993

Dear Larry,

I'm in the awkward position of having to tell you that our policy at SAQ is to back the decisions of those guest editors we have called upon to gather together an issue for us. This has a couple of times meant publishing essays that we were only luke-warm about. In the present instance, it means backing Dery's decision not to include your piece. Policy or no policy, however, I have gone through the essay, just to make sure--and I wish I'd been in on this early, saved both yourself and Dery some time explaining yourselves by saying simply that the piece is not right for this particular magazine. We're trying to do a somewhat tricky thing here (as we did with the rock 'n roll issue): ask our generally solidly academic subscribers to engage something different. The essays Dery has gathered speak to this audience in a way yours does not--too much self-conscious apparatus for this gang. So it's not the essay, it's the venue. I'm sure there's a better place for your piece out there. And I will definitely watch the movie. Thanks,~

Melissa Lentricchia

Managing Editor

Epilogue. A (Windowless) Sense of an Ending: The Whistle Is Blown

Sooner or later, whatever the game, the whistle is blown. Even in hyperspace, there is disconnection. One last windowless trajectory.

--Robert Coover, "Endings"

Last words of the computer-scanned version of the typed transcription of the interview with David Blair:

LM: Last question. The birds, the doves that you find.

DB: You mean the winged angels?

LM: In the very beginning.

The End . . . ?

There is no final Word. There is always a new view, a new idea, a reinterpretation. And literature, which we propose to electronify, is a system for preserving continuity in the face of this fact.

--Ted Nelson [one of hypertext's originators], *Literary Machine*

SB: Of course, you wound up making an electronic video (as opposed to a virtual reality environment), but within the video, you stress the concept of virtual reality environments over and over, and present these in a lot of interesting ways. That emphasis seems to imply some kind of position on your part about its potential significance . . .

DB: It does, yes, but keep in mind that when I started *Wax* back in '85, there really *was* no virtual reality--at least no term for that. At that point people simply didn't know about the realism of the flight simulation environments that were already being developed by the Army. So when I started out, *Wax* wasn't specifically about virtual reality but about the ways people were talking and thinking about concepts that eventually led to all this interest we see today in virtual reality. The *Max Headroom* television show came out about that time, for example, and of course by 1980 the election of a virtual president, Ronald Reagan, was already generating a lot of talk about the replacement of the real by media-images.

SB: That was about the same time that Baudrillard and other important critical books dealing with simulation were just appearing over here in English translations.

DB: Actually Baudrillard had already been translated a bit earlier. I read his *Simulations* pretty early on, for example, and found it to be a great read because of its poetics. If I had I been able to read it back in '77, '78 or

'79 while I was trying to understand Pynchon, I would have died and gone to heaven because so many of the key things Pynchon was talking about in *Gravity's Rainbow*--all those areas that postmodernist theorists were exploring about imminence and transcendence, about the denaturing of the body, melanin cells and reagents, and all that other stuff relating to the way our bodies and our sense of the real was being transformed--were already being explicated right there in *Simulations*, only placed into a different context.

BL: So, without imputing intentionality on your part to all of this, you certainly see your thinking as being part of this whole range of postmodernist thought and interrogations that were going on in the early-to-mid 80's?

DB: It's like being in the submarine on the way to America with the proto-Mormons--not that I ever was there...In a situation like that, who do think you are and where do you think you're going--especially if the Book of Mormon was wrong and no one on board had ever heard of God or the Tower of Babel, except what they'd read in some books in the pingpong room? But I'd say that what I was essentially trying to do during this period was to understand certain texts and then somehow applying what I was learning to a narrative form. By the mid-eighties, it became clear to me that other people were in the same boat I was in. We all seemed to be trying to figure out the same topics and suddenly there was to be a lot more for us to read about these things.

SB: . You just mentioned you were trying to fit these speculations into a narrative which wound up guiding some of your research. When did you decide that you wanted to work in *narrative* form--as opposed to the seemingly non-narrative psychedelic video work you had been working on earlier?

DB: Pynchon was the main model I was working from because he had found a way to combine psychedelic visual materials and narrative. I don't mean to overemphasize Pynchon's impact on my work-- it's not like I had *Gravity's Rainbow* laying around in the bathroom the whole time (though it was). But he was important to my work because all that "stuff" he was dealing with in *Gravity's Rainbow* was presented in (or modeled on) terms borrowed from visual media, and so it had its most immediate effect in visual media. Unfortunately there was no visual media at that point which was actually showing the kind of metamorphoses, transformations, grotesqueries you found in *Gravity's Rainbow* in an immediate, instantaneous manner, the way you can in words. There simply weren't any movies or videos operating in that mode. At that point nobody could even imagine how to make a movie of *The Crying of Lot 49* for Christssake, much less *Gravity's Rainbow*. Even the actual SF movies you'd see during that time seemed anachronistic; their plots and visual imagination seemed to be taken out of one of those old Ace SF paperbacks (where you had two SF books glued to each other, back to back, one upside down and the other not) with some scriptwriter in Hollywood had cut it in half, torn away the back book, then cut the front book in half, spun the back section upside-down and glued the new halves back to back, then passed that collage onto the next level of approval, which did the same this again, so that by the time you got to actually making the movie, there were only a few discontinuous pages left.

Bee In Egyptian hieroglyphic language, the sign of the bee was as determinative in royal nomenclature, partly by analogy with the monarchic organization of these insects, but more especially because of the ideas of industry, creative activity and wealth which are associated with the production of honey. In the parable of Samson (Judges, xiv, 8) the bee appears in this same sense. In Greece it was emblematic of work and obedience. According to a Delphic tradition, the second of the temples built in Delphi had been erected by bees. In Orphic teaching, souls were symbolized by bees, not only because of the association with honey but also because they migrate from the hive in swarms, since it was held that souls "swarm" from the divine unity in a similar manner. In Christian symbolism, and particularly during the Romanesque period, bees were symbols of diligence and eloquence. In the Indo-Aryan and Moslem traditions they have the same purely spiritual significance as in Orphic teaching.