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Interview with Jim Blashfield (audio)

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Narrator: Jim Blashfield (**JB**)

Interviewer: Heather O. Petrocelli (**HP**)

Date: August 23, 2011

Place: Jim Blashfield's studio in Portland, Oregon

Transcribed by Carolee Harrison, January 2014

Audited by Meg Langford, February 2014

Semi-Verbatim Transcript

HP: This is Heather Oriana Petrocelli interviewing Jim Blashfield on August 23, 2011, in Portland Oregon, in his studio. Jim, do I have permission to record you for the Center for the Moving Image oral history collection?

JB: Yes.

HP: Could you please state your full name, date, and place of birth?

JB: My name is James Robert Blashfield, Jr., and I was born September 4, 1944 in Seattle, Washington, in King County Hospital.

HP: That's quite an answer. The way I've been starting all the interviews is asking the narrators to essentially tell me a little bit about how their relationship to film developed—if it was a youthful, young-boy thing or if it came later on?

JB: When I was kid...you never heard anybody talking about becoming a filmmaker, as far as I could tell. It wasn't "Hey, I'm..." you know... it wasn't a seventh-grader saying..."I've got a script and I'm trying to take it around." So I used to remember when I was about nineteen years old, when I was watching a film, it dawned on me—"These are made by actual people. I wonder if I could make one." I just didn't... it was *that* fresh a thought, shall we say? About that time...one of my interests was being an actor and so I was in some plays at the Portland Civic Theatre, and one of the plays I was in was "The Fantastics." And I played the mute. And another person that was in this play was a guy named John Rausch, who was a couple of years older than me, maybe three or four years older than me, and he was learning to be a filmmaker, and in fact had been making those short 8-millimeter films.

And I just glommed onto John. And we became friends, and I learned quite a bit from him, and I got to put my hands on a camera for the first time, and learned about editing; we just spent lots of time trying to...overcome ridiculous technical issues related to making a movie in

8mm and things like that. And I guess my model at the time really was entertainment films. I'd seen documentaries, and I'd seen animation, and things, but I think that was in my mind, I think I had in mind that I was going to both somehow shoot these films, direct them, and act in them. I believe that was what I thought I was going to do!

And so my interest developed, and at that time I started seeing a wider variety of films. Particularly, I was interested in Fellini, and I remember the film *Hallelujah the Hills*, by...either Jonas or Adolfo Mekas, I can't remember which one, which I saw at Portland State. Some alternative films—films that were alternatives to the normal entertainment that I'd grown up with. Because I think one of my first images was, I wanted to make a James Bond movie. And I had an image...I wanted a shot of a sports car coming up and, with the light filling the lens, you know, and then a cool guy gets out...and, that was about it. But then I began seeing these other films, and began to think of myself more as, more aligned with Fellini or some of the absurdists. As well as being interested in dramatic films.

So I started making an 8mm film on my own, called [*Alice 20*], which was a kind of metaphorical, poetic film. So by the time CMI showed up on the scene, I don't know how I knew that there were going to be filmmaking classes at Portland State, but somehow it got in the wind, and so by that time I'd actually been doing some filmmaking for a while, and I actually had a 16mm camera. So I just gravitated over to CMI. And when I tried to get in, I couldn't get in because the class was all filled up. Because typically I was just behind the eight ball... [self-mocking] *Well, uh... some classes, yes, well, they'd been announced for eight months or something like that. But... I talked to Tom Taylor on the phone and said I really want to be in this class; he said Well, I can put you on... you can come to the classes for a while, and if an opening shows up, you know, if someone leaves the class then you could join the class.*

So that's how I got into CMI, and of course then CMI had such a strong documentary orientation, not just documentary but what Andries Deinum called "the documentary idea." He taught a class called "The Documentary Idea," which was a kind of offshoot of pure documentary, but really was more about the way what Andries called "genuine human values" are reflected in fictional films, as opposed to fictional films that are mostly, you know, fantastic or for entertainment or... that kind of thing. So that's when I started to get introduced to both lots of documentaries, but also...narrative films that were narrative, but they were not purely for entertainment—they were made by artists who had something else up their sleeve, you know.

HP: To just kind of get the timing right in my head, you said that you had seen the Mekas film...at PSU. Through the PSU Film Committee?

JB: Well, I don't know. I wasn't at PSU, so there was just a point... sometime when I'm...I don't know how old I was. When I was 20, or something? I mean, 19? Or something. Someone, *Oh look, that's Portland State University*, I mean, *Oh look, you can...* I had attended there... I don't think... I was not that truly engaged with school, you know... up to the point that I actually got into the film department. Yeah, somebody said, *They're showing films tonight*, in such-and-such a room, *do you want to go?* I had a friend who was sort of ahead of me in terms of his appreciation of other kinds of films, so I just went right along, and watched this crazy... [holding back laughter] watched this crazy, crazy film!

HP: And then when you finally did start getting into the CMI classes, it wasn't that you had actually *been* going to PSU?

JB: Oh, I had been going. I have quite the broken college, crumpled and taped-together college career, so I... by that time, I may well have gone to Portland State at least two other times. Well, I think that by that time I had to Portland State probably twice, I'd gone to College of Marin in Marin County, and I had gone to Clark College in Vancouver. I'd gone to all of those places, in, you know, fits and starts really.

HP: And then, as far as the... you had been making film, you'd done that 8mm; you had a 16mm camera, you had your friend that you had learned things from and worked together with. So was CMI your first *formal* film education, in an academic setting?

JB: Well, actually my *first* formal education was at College of Marin, and it was what was called a film appreciation class. We would watch, we watched the entirety of *Intolerance* on 8mm from one end to another, silent. You know, it was wonder..., we saw *all* of the historically sig—or a huge number of historically significant films there. But it wasn't a production

environment, which was fine. It was an appreciation... introduction to history of film, you might say.

HP: When you enrolled in CMI, you've mentioned both Andries Deinum *and* Tom Taylor; did you actively seek out both theory and production once in?

JB: Yeah, yeah. I actually... once I enrolled at Portland State in order to take filmmaking classes at CMI, the first thing that was on my mind was production, but very quickly we were...I suppose Tom said, *Andries Deinum's classes are very important and I would recommend that you take them.* I don't know how it came about, but very quickly most of us slipped over into Andries Deinum's classes, which were theory, philosophy...they were all kinds of things. They certainly weren't most people's idea of...they didn't really conform to, I don't think, to either previous or more modern notions of how you...of film criticism or theory study, because they were so personal. Andries said, "I teach myself." Meaning *I teach through my experience of a person engaged with the making of moving images and their value culturally, and my own experience with that.* All of his classes were basically... all of his classes were, he would sit at a desk on the stage with his file cards, and he would maybe talk about the film we had seen the previous Tuesday, which had just been a viewing situation—I don't think there was any lecture associated with it. And then he might use that to kick off his discussion, or his thoughts. And then we also, we kept journals. That's how our participation was evaluated, I guess. But he saw it as kind of a conversation between him and his students, so we would keep journals and turn them in, I don't know, on some kind of basis in which we had commented upon, talked about, about both things that he had said in class and also the films.

HP: How would you characterize Deinum as a professor? Was he someone that... I mean, from your experiences, how would you characterize his method of teaching film?

JB: Yeah.

HP: I guess beyond, "I teach myself."

JB: Well, I'm not too sure how much more I can say. I would say that he brought up lots of ideas about the role of film in culture; about kinds of films, films that he felt. I guess as I said before, reflected genuine human values, and why do we want to reflect genuine human values; and, you know, so he stimulated us. One of the things he did is he set up a "film/movie" dichotomy, so basically he's saying that what we think of as entertainment films are movies, and then there are these other, these other things called films, and they might be documentaries and they might be narrative films of a certain type and so on. And this got all kinds of conversations going, because one, it irritated people. [laughing] He would, well, you know, *why are you making this distinction?* But he was making it because it was useful for people to be able to consider certain things which were really aligned with values and function. And of course films don't divide that easily. But those extremes were helpful.

So his way of teaching basically was to give, was to provide alternate ways to think about things, and to say interesting and provocative things that would cause us to respond, to agree or disagree, or talk among ourselves and say... we found him to be very bright and stimulating, and so the filmmaking students that I knew from class were also taking his class. We were... this conversation was always going on. And it was basically just a big investigation of what the actual function of being a filmmaker might be other than having a career and being famous or something. And it affected everybody, it affected people who would... who did not come into any of the classes thinking that they were interested in documentary, but almost everyone became interested in documentary, including me. I wouldn't have said I had no interest in it, but I... everybody just became... you know, we saw lots of documentary films, and discussed them, and everybody just became very, very interested in ways in which documentary does and does not reflect reality, and in what ways does it distort reality and which ways does it reflect it and... we talked about, we discussed or heard about models such as *Challenge for Change* in Canada, in which film—at that time, you have to remember, this is 1971 or something like this—in which film is basically, films are being made and shown on TV with the function of helping one part of a population understand things about another part of the population. There were some interesting conclusions.

One conclusion I came to—remember, these were very political times, also—and one of the conclusions that I came to was you should be careful about making an insightful documentary about a group of people, unless you want to take the risk of destroying them.

Because a really successful film will, a really successful documentary will provide insights into the interior functioning of a subculture, shall we say, that you might not be able to get otherwise as an outsider, and information creates the possibility of making this population more vulnerable, if it's accurate. *Oh, this is how they work; oh, this is how they think.* And, you know, since there's so much, there's so much... [exhales] historically, there's just been so much energy invested in removing, removing indigenous populations and small population groups from the country that you claim as your own, I mean it's always and forever an ongoing thing. So that came up too. Here we are, we're glorifying and appreciating documentary, and then this idea comes up, *Hmm. I wonder if we should be...* just taking the wholesale attitude that good documentaries that show how people in situations operate are good things. Maybe there are some downsides to this, too.

And maybe the best documentary of, say, an endangered group can have the effect of leading to their demise. An interesting and provocative thought. I mean, and it really seems almost to be true, because, if you... there's the South American Indians that are very isolated... and I'm not really very knowledgeable but, a couple of groups that are very very isolated, and these efforts to get in there and photograph them, and *wouldn't that be good?* Ethnographic film was a big part of what we were watching and learning about, and so, therefore, from an academic or some other standpoint, wouldn't it be worthwhile to get in to this group of people where outsiders have never ventured, and get close to them and document them? And you can just see where that one leads. I mean, you just know... because all that's accelerated more today, you can just see that it goes right on TV, and immediately they're, the people are being plucked out to be clothing models or something. I mean, whatever you can think of to capitalize, I mean, in other words, it's sort of evident now. [chuckling]

HP: Was there a particular experience then—like a film that you had been part of or a film that you... either some of your fellow, your cohort or from Taylor or Deinum that...[interrupted] ?

JB: Yeah. Yeah, there was a film, and I can't say... Yes, there was a film... there was a film and I'm not sure which tribespeople it was about, Tom Taylor presented it as this film that was, that we should watch that was very very good, and then I believe he also described some

conditions that, and situations that followed, that led to their demise. And I think he raised that question of—*isn't this a mixed blessing*.

HP: Interesting.

JB: Yeah. Also, I mean, another one that may have been in the same film, or it may have been in another film, that, it was a film about a tribe that, the men in a tribe who were hunting... either a large animal, maybe a giraffe, or maybe an elephant, I'm not sure; and it's all about how these people working as a team managed to hunt and take down this animal. And the way the story went is, and when you watch the film, you see this occurring. But the behind-the-scenes story that Tom told us was that they were running out of light before the animal was completely taken down, and they needed to get a shot of the animal lying there dead at the end of their process. And so one of the people who had a gun shot the animal. It was close to... it was going to die anyway, it had been hunted down, it would die sooner or later, but it would die after dark. So someone shot the animal, and they filmed it as though that had not occurred, and... we began to see these aspects of... of [chuckling] related to the so-called truth-telling, the so-called truth-telling of ethnographic film.

HP: Before I move on to learn more about your experiences with Tom Taylor, was there anything that you... looking back, to, what 1971-ish, about forty years ago, were there any threads of things you learned with *Deinum* that have stuck with you, or changed your career as a filmmaker?

JB: Oh, I think that everything that I learned, I mean, everything that I can remember that went in my head, when I was at CMI stuck with me. Even though the films that I... I made a variety of films; I did make some documentaries after that, and I was making... for a while I was making public relations documentaries for what is now Metro. And I took some ideas... we, you know, so this idea, coming out of what I just said, this idea of *how can you make documentaries that have a high level of authenticity to them*, was in our heads. Whether this public information film about land use really needed to have that level of authenticity or not, I don't know, but it was certainly in my head as I was directing, for example, the mayor of Beaverton as he was talking

about their responsibilities to development in a growing Beaverton, for example. Rather than doing—film was expensive, unlike video, it was very expensive—and so rather than doing, as many people would do, which would be probably to pre-interview and then perhaps write him a little script in which he would concisely say the things, the points that you thought would help move the story forward, I would ask leading questions and just let them talk. And I was pretty good at asking the leading questions... I could, you know, if they would go in the wrong direction I could kind of get them back. But I was not telling them what to say. I was waiting for it to come out, so that the result would be both more real, but also, other things might be said that I would not have thought of; and the person's personality comes out, and they're not suddenly feeling like *oh, I'm supposed to perform something here*. They get to continue to just talk. Well, I suppose I spent many many hundreds of dollars on film that, when I looked at it, was going *well, I'm not using this and this and this, and I'm not using this, I'm not using this*, you know. But, I'm glad about it. It led to a much more exploratory approach to shooting films.

Yeah, so I did make some documentaries and you know, with Jack Sanders I made the historical documentary *They Hailed a Steamboat Anyplace*, but even, later, when I think of it, the most... later, when I started doing music videos for Talking Heads and Paul Simon and Peter Gabriel and folks. Since mostly these were people who I thought had something to say as musicians; that they were reflecting upon things that mattered and were of interest to them, I treated these music videos as documentaries to some degree. If you look at them with that in mind, you might be able to see it. So that I would meet with them and say something like, *Well, what were you thinking... what were you thinking about when you wrote these lines?* And try to... get them to just expand from that, and basically sort of... figure out who they were, and leave enough time and space to figure out who they were so that I knew that if I went in and worked on these pieces, which I was doing pretty autonomously, that I would be doing so with respect for who they really were and what they were really trying to do with this artwork that they made.

And so in that way, I think that kind of mirrors the idea of ... well, we know that there's sort of a... there's a couple ways to document something. One is to have a preconception, which often very much drives it. Why would even think you wanted to go document something if you didn't have some preconception about what... that it was worthwhile? But often what you take with you are more than that, a notion that it's worthwhile. You often start taking some of your

conclusions with you as well, when you go into the documenting process; you say well, *this is probably... I'd better talk to them about this; I assume this to be true*. And you might even, you might find that there's just, for an example, something ironic in the story, in your thinking, before you've ever spoken to them. Maybe there's a conflict of values or something, and so maybe you go in basically, in many cases, people go in with the story already figured out, and are allegedly making a film *about* somebody, but really they're just employing the people to carry out their own preconceptions. And, so that's one way to make a film.

Then the other way, that we learned at CMI, was basically go hang out, and be with the people for... see if you can allow them to let you be a fly on the wall, and maybe be involved with them for a while, get to know them, so that by the time you start – and don't – with no cameras, nothing – and by the time you start, you will have gotten to know some of the people a bit, you start to maybe see things going on you never would have anticipated. Very often, you just, once you've got that comfort level going, you just start to record, very often, ending the day going *Oh, man, I don't know what I'm going to do with this footage*, you know, because maybe it didn't seem like what you were thinking, what you were making a film about wasn't reflected there at all. And then after you've shot your zillions of hours, in the editing—I mean, it's basically a way of making films that respects the notion that the film will be discovered in the editing process. You start out with this data that you've gathered, and then you stare at it, and perhaps you see... what often will happen is you go through the footage and maybe show it to other people and you hear what people are talking about it, and you see *Oh, I see the story is really something different than I thought. I see—this part that I couldn't understand what was going on here, why were the people doing that? That was actually what was going on*. And we thought it was about the wedding, but really it was about something else that was showing up in the scenes. And so you find your movie through process. And I took that and applied it... So those were some of the values that were taught to us at CMI. Central to it, respect for your subject matter; I mean for your *people*; respect for your people... just respect for the people.

But that experience of finding the film in the footage, finding a film that you did not necessarily anticipate that you were going to make in the footage, led me down some other paths, to one of my other areas, which is doing experimental work, and work that... um, well, doing experimental work. One film that I did called *The Mid-Torso of Inez*, that I did with Vern Luce, was really based on the experience of editing your way out of corners in a documentary. Because

the documentary, not only being about what it's about, needs to have certain structural elements to it so that it works for people on an emotional and logical and dramatic basis. And very often, you know, in the film, you might, in a documentary, you might say *I just don't know where these scenes are going to go in this film; they don't seem to belong here, and they don't seem to belong here, and yet it seems like they should be in the film...* And sometimes you get them to fit by restructuring the entire film to get this one section. Now you have a very different film, and maybe that was a good idea and maybe not. But *The Mid-Torso of Inez* was kind of based on the experience of treating your own footage as found footage, in a way, and also based on the alleged experiences of Salvador Dalí and Bunuel when they were making *Andalusian Dog*. They described it. It was described as a film in which they had agreed—this is my recollection—they described it as a film they were going to make in which one scene did not connect with another. They were going make sure that the scenes they made did not bear a relationship to one another, and that's what they were going to use, kind of as their... whatever you want to call it... set of circumstances that they were going to deal with and, okay, *some kind of order is going to be created, but we're already setting ourselves up for disorder, and now what will come out of it?*

And so I was very interested in that, so we made *The Mid-Torso of Inez* in that way, started out making it in that way. But I found, just as I've found since then, that that's hard to do. It's hard to say *I am making a...* to have in your mind you're going to make some kind of coherent thing, and to willfully make scenes that do not relate to one another, because there's a kind of human desire to get things to connect to one another, to make sense with one another. Because there's a little part that looks at this disaster that you're intentionally making for yourself and wants it to be successful. So you're at odds with yourself, and... um, yeah. It is very hard not to start to want to connect things and shooting scenes to support the things you've already shot. It's very hard to get yourself to not do that, because the, you know the [laughing]... the cloud of disaster is hanging over your, over this project, which of course it should be, you know, and many people consider that a ridiculous thing to be doing, but artists basically do it all the time: Create problems for themselves and, in the solution, find both maybe new structural possibilities for something, and also maybe new subject matter. And maybe a new emotional relationship to the things that they make.

So, that came out of documentary, but it also came out of any number of other things that I was interested in, including, let's say, *Hallelujah the Hills* originally, but then in the early '70s

I... I was always interested in experimental film, short experimental films. So in the early '70s [coughs] I started going to the Bellevue Film Festival, along with a lot of people. And the Bellevue Film Festival, believe it or not, in a shopping mall in Bellevue, was one of the premier independent short film experimental film festivals in the country, and maybe in the world. It had a thousand-dollar grand prize, which was unheard of in the early '70s, really just unheard of. And so all of the sort of heroes, you know, there were loads of New York and San Francisco experimental filmmakers, and then various other people scattered around the country, and you would go to these screenings which were... well, they started at 9 o'clock in the morning and went until 2 o'clock at night with different films playing, I mean it was a... it was really... you know, pressed—really, really pushed you. But we would watch them, and we would—some of these films were very hard to watch, too. Some of them were extremely challenging; they were the kinds of films that might be very actually unpleasant to sit through in the present, but which stay with you and which you never forget, because they kind of work on your dreams and they work on your unconscious. [coughs] They are really not to amuse you in the moment. The idea that film is supposed to be an amusement, that amuses you in the moment, is just one idea that you can have about filmmaking. There's plenty of art that ingratiates and provokes over a period of time. And so we were seeing lots of films like that, too. The idea of really playing around with... oh, all kinds of things—time, expectations, just all kinds of notions, was very exciting. CMI's relationship to these kinds of things was supportive. Let me just put it this way. In practice, it was supportive. CMI was defin—was, as I said, based on the notion of the social function of basically documentary and the documentary idea. And Andries Deinum would talk about certain films that he had seen, meaning, like these experimental films that I had seen, which he called “moving wallpaper,” and... so he was not interested in those films. He was not interested in a graphic film.

And of course, right in, about in there, there was a lot of really kind of wild stuff being put in 1971... a lot of stuff coming out of the social movements that were going on that was making its way onto film that was... there was just all kinds of stuff going on. But Deinum I would say... I don't really know what he thought of... you know, I made a film called *Eddie's Tennis Shoes*. And... a 16mm film, which I made up under the camera and then managed to somehow... I borrowed CMI's old news camera and I managed to put the soundtrack on the film, on this animated film, before it ever even went to the lab, so that it came out of the lab and

we put it directly in the projector and it had a soundtrack. The soundtrack wasn't in sync or anything, but it was a soundtrack I made that didn't have to be in sync, and part of the experiment would be *how do these images that I've never seen go together with the sound?* So I remember, I worked this out with Tom, could we do this and this and this, could we get this to work, blah blah blah. It came out of the lab. It cost thirty-one dollars or something, and we put it in the projector, and there it was! Just merrily playing along with its sound, the sound seemed to be going nicely with the images, and Tom was enthused about that.

And... Deinum, that wasn't his – certainly, it wasn't, you know, the thing he would be most interested in. I imagine when he saw it, was perhaps kind of astonished by it too. I suspect he could see—I'm not just talking about my own work, I'm just talking about anybody's work that was off of his central interest—I'm sure he saw value in many places other than just his focus. But his focus was serious. CMI, the production unit, there were... we, we made documentaries and were encouraged to, but we also, some people made narrative films, and some people made animation, and that was all completely supported. It wasn't... it wasn't taught. If you wanted to make an animated film, you'd better find out how to do it, because Tom Taylor will show you where the camera is and show you where the single-frame button is, and... but he's not prepared to teach animation, because he's a kind of a documentary and public information kind of filmmaker himself. But everything was... nothing was “not allowed.”

HP: How would you characterize Tom Taylor? He clearly seems like he was a collaborator as much as a teacher in some respects?

JB: Let me think. Well, the first thing, you probably hear this from a thousand people. The first thing you notice about Tom Taylor as a student is he spoke so quietly you could hardly hear him. And he appeared very reticent and shy. So that he would sometimes not make full sentences as he was telling you things... So people just had to listen very carefully. And that was a central aspect of who he... of his presentation, who he was. He was also a very determined and focused person, right along the very same lines as Andries Deinum, but more from a production... but, well, right along the lines of Andries Deinum, in the same camp, *and* he was a production guy. Who had worked in L.A. on various films and things and had come up, been brought up by Andries Deinum to produce... produce a series for educational television here. So that's how

Tom got here, as the guy who was going to shoot the things that Andries Deinum was going to be talking about in *Urban Mosaic*, the TV show that he dreamed up.

Tom was a facilitator. So there's Tom and what he thinks and believes, and what he teaches, and then there's Tom the facilitator, whose notion was to get, along with Andries, to get equipment into people's hands. And, CMI had a rag-tag bunch of equipment, too. This notion of putting production equipment in people's hands was central to the Center for the Moving Image, and the reason, the idea behind that was that film should come from real people talking about their lives and things that are of concern and interest to them, not from professionals looking for markets for films, or with glossy notions of how to present things. Nothing could make them happier than somebody from the sociology department, or somewhere, coming over and wanting to make a film about something that was of interest to them. And that was really one of the central functions of CMI. [pauses]

Let's see, what was I going to say about that. Oh. A lot of people wished that CMI would become a department, because they would like to major in film and maybe get a degree in film. And you could see why students might like that—they love film, and they would like to do that. Andries and Tom were opposed to it; they did not want it to be a department. They wanted it to... they thought that film should always be *about* something, would be the way that they'd put it. Not a product... that film should come out of people's genuine interests and passions. I think Andries talked about "inspired amateurs." That he was interested in CMI developing inspired amateurs. Which is really pretty great. So that's basically what they did, and of course some people... yeah, and some of those inspired amateurs made one film. Diana Cvitanovich made a film which turned out to be a really significant portrait of a certain part of the riverine environment around Portland... It was what she came in to do and it was what she made. And there were others like that, and then there were some that just went on to make loads of films, and go out and become filmmakers, you know. But it was not the objective of CMI to create bundles of filmmakers heading out into the world to get jobs. [45:03]

HP: For your time there, who were some of the filmmakers in your community *then*, in CMI, who you have maintained some kind of relationship with in the present?

JB: Oh, who are some of the filmmakers that were involved with CMI in those days that I still have relationships with? Well, Jack Sanders was a fellow student, and we did the steamboat documentary together, and planned some other projects that didn't occur. And along that way, we did interesting things together and became friends. The fact is that this, particularly where I seem to be at right now, I don't see a lot of people as often as I used to, you know? Just because people are doing different things at a certain point in their lives. But, so, I mean some of the people who were my... Tom Taylor asked me to teach his class for him for a year when he went on sabbatical, in maybe '72 or something like that. So there are some people who were my students. And Jim Likowski was one, and Mark Verheiden, and... Diana, and, and others, Lori Meeker, who had previously been a student of mine at Cleveland High School and then was a student of mine at Portland State and then she went on to be a film teacher and filmmaker at Evergreen. I might have to think a bit to... but, quite a few people. [pause] Yeah, quite a few people.

HP: Do you mind if I change the tape real quick?

JB: Nuh-uh.

[new tape]

JB: Yeah, some of the other people that were there at the time, Harry Dawson was there; Charles Auch; this was in the beginning, the first couple years of CMI... Peggy Lindquist—Blashfield at the time—the woman to whom I was married was there taking classes; various people would... Joe Uris would float through; or, I shouldn't say float through, I think he and Brooke did a project together. Clyde Keller; I'm sure I'm leaving out some other people. At any rate, you know, the question that you have is, *How does the influence of CMI, does the influence... Did CMI continue to have an influence over time?* You might have to do some detective work there, because most of the people that you're talking about, who were there, are now in their sixties. [pauses] Some of the people taught, and so, that be one way to kind of track this.

Well, I taught, and so surely I must have influenced people who are maybe, oh, ten years younger than I was. And others—I mean, I taught there, and I also taught at Artist in the Schools, you know, I'm not sure what kind of serious filmmaking... teaching I was able to do in Artist in the Schools; I was kind of guerilla filmmaking... But, at any rate, I guess what I'm getting at is... well, how would that influence be pushed forward? And usually it is pushed forward, either through mentors, people who maybe hire younger people who are then influenced by them, and another is through... academically, through learning filmmaking from people. So I think you might have to kind of get into that realm. Okay, like check with the—this is your group—check with the thirty-five and forty-year-old filmmakers around here and see if any of them have any connections back to any of these people. Because otherwise I think it's kind of hard to track, really. Do you see what I mean? Because basically the sixty-somethings may not know very much about what the forty-year-olds are doing, filmmakers are doing right now. In my case, many of them are just names of people. Sarah Marcus here, the filmmaker and editor, is in about that age group, over on the other side of my wall. And she and her husband Reed Harkness are filmmakers who, among other things, are documentary filmmakers, who I would not be surprised from knowing... the degree to which I know them that they aren't really reflection—I believe that they are reflections of many of these values that I'm talking about, but I have no way of knowing.

You know, I think a lot of these values got out into the culture. I think a lot of these values got out into the culture. Obviously, there's a lot of awareness now that the so-called reality, mediated reality that's been fed to us, over the years, is not really reality. But that was not really so clear in 1968. Or 1970. That was not so clear to people. We had to kind of learn that, but I think most of the thirty-year-olds and forty-year-olds who are interested in these things understand that it's about something else other than replicating the dominant paradigm. And that's... did CMI make that happen? It might have influenced it; who even knows about the butterfly wing, you know? But... the other thing you could say was that CMI was a harbinger... that CMI was a kind of harbinger of consciousness to come, an early example of certain types of awareness that became more commonplace among people who cared about these things, over time. Yeah. But still, it could be, I know you would probably like to track down the real and true humans who were dragging the tablets with them, and they're probably... could be done.

Really, in fact, a lot of the Chamberlin/Blakeslee/Shadburne films, they reflect that. I think particularly of the ocean film, *Land's Edge*. There was a... there was an interest in breaking down the wall. And some of it was just stylistic—you can see it right now; you can see, you know, like all the commercials and everything, with the flash frames in between people speaking, which of course comes out of documentary, but it just basically became a style for making things seem more authentic than they actually were. In *Land's Edge*, there's one scene, that I thought was so cool at the time—this was like 1973 or something like that—they're off on this fishing boat in a storm, and Richard is shooting, and Tom has the microphone and is slating at the beginning of the shot. And, oh man, you know, the water line is going up and down like this. But the shot begins with Tom kind of standing in the doorway, kind of holding himself against the door, and slating the shot by tapping the microphone, which is a way that you could do it. And then the camera moves around and shows the shot, but that was left in... at the time, that was breaking down the illusion. It wouldn't be so unusual now, but it was unusual then, and the fact that, you know, that they... they said, *We're in this place here, and we're going to make our presence known; we're documenting this*. We're not going to pretend like we're not here. It was significant, I would say, at least for me.

HP: This is sort of a non sequitur, but oddly something just that made me think of this. I was reading something about you where you have a reputation for working successfully, being a prominent filmmaker in the Pacific Northwest and Portland, specifically, and one of the things of note is that you kept a lot of the business in Portland; you didn't leave to go do things, you stayed here. Could you just talk to me a little bit about how... I mean, clearly that must have been a very pointed decision, you must have actively decided to do it that way, or... am I mistaken?

JB: Well, when we began... you know, the first films that we did, Melissa and I, that were really for outside of this region, that were going to be distributed on a large scale, were the music videos that Melissa clicked into action. You know, I had made a film called *Suspicious Circumstances*, an animated cut-out film, and Melissa had sent it off to Talking Heads' management without... out of the blue. I had been to the *Stop Making Sense* concert a couple of years before and had suddenly just, well, I was *late*, but suddenly become a huge Talking Heads

fan, and Melissa knew that, and *Suspicious Circumstances* was a film that was getting a lot of attention, and so she just, rather than listen to me who might say, “Gee, I’m not sure that they would really like it, or want me to make their video for them, ohhh I don’t know about that”; Melissa just sent it off. And within a couple of days we get this response back: *David [Byrne] wants to talk to you about doing a music video for their new song*. So, we went into... we began working extremely hard on this. And it was extremely nervous-making, you know, to be... here, *What are we doing here?* We said that in 28 days we would be able to deliver to MTV a music video for Talking Heads!

So we gathered people around us and just began working night and day on it. And one of the things that I insisted on was that it all be kept a secret. So that none of the people working on the film, everyone agreed they would not talk about it; they wouldn’t tell their friends or anything what they were doing. Because I had a concern that, you know, that if it got out it would become a distraction to what we were doing and what we were trying to do was hard enough anyway without suddenly being so self-conscious about what you’re doing, *we’re making a video for Talking Heads*. And, so everybody kept it quiet, and, right until the end, and... well, let me drop back a little bit.

Harry Dawson—this actually relates—Harry Dawson, one the filmmakers I mentioned, influenced by the Center for the Moving Image, had made a film called *Dawson Family Reunion* for the very first Portland, the very first Northwest Film Festival, the very first one. With a juror from San Francisco. And it was in the Berg Swann auditorium at the museum. It was filled with people, the first big film festival, and there were all kinds of films, including Blakeslee and Shadburne and Chamberlin had a film in there, and I may have, I don’t know; bunches of people did, probably people from out of the state. And Harry had made this film, *Dawson Family Reunion*, which was an 8mm film, silent, half-hour long, taken, photographed without a tripod, just documenting his own family reunion. No sound, and so, there’s just this footage, and it’s not, it has no dramatic structure to it, it is just using med—and, once again, with the passage of time, it’s really hard to kind of see the significance of what I’m talking about—using media, not to glamorize something or entertain, but to simply, you might say honor, or recognize the ordinariness of the things that go on around us, that matter to us. And that was his film. A half-hour long, no sound, camera wobbling around... you know, teenagers standing and kind of being shy with one another, and people eating potato salad, and the juror gave it first prize.

And it created quite a stir, and there was booing, and it was such a departure from the conventional notion of what a well-made film was, you know? And it was a precursor of some of the current aesthetics, which is, craft is not the highest thing. It was intentional. Harry knew how to shoot film with a tripod and make professional-looking images, and so when he got first prize, and I think Blakeslee/Shadburne/Chamberlin maybe got second or third prize, of fifty dollars I suppose, and Richard sent the fifty-dollar prize back to the festival with the instruction that it be used to buy Harry Dawson a tripod! [laughing] So this kind of shows you... where things were, until we all kind of merged in a way, or, not everyone. Some people stayed just... they always were commercial; that was their interest, and they stayed that way. Others, like Chamberlin/Shadburne/Blakeslee, trying to do personal work in a commercially distributed venue, and then others making films that you would know would have no distribution whatsoever, but you're making them because you... you want to.

So, let's see, so why did I bring this up? Oh. The idea of Harry making a film about something ordinary around him. In my film *Suspicious Circumstances*, it was very much about an appreciation of ordinary stuff around us; it was shot in my a—animated film, but made in my apartment, from photos of details of the apartment and so on. A Pepsi bottle, cans of food... and that was an aesthetic—that was both a values issue and an aesthetic that was a very interesting... was of interest to me, and I wanted it to continue to be reflected in my, in this Talking Heads video. And I knew the Talking Heads would be the perfect ones, really, that they would really *get* why I would want to show certain things. The celebration of the ordinary things around us that made up the imagery. And you can see a direct connection between the *Suspicious Circumstances* and that Talking Heads video for the song “And She Was.” So, right from the start, that was to be a personal, that was to be... the Talking Heads video was to be a reflection of those values, while illustrating and complementing the song.

So it was to be about what's real, and we live here in Portland, therefore it's going to have Portland in it. Now, the people that worked on it were going to be from Portland. One thing that was very... you know, there was two aspects to that; this question of having as much production go on here as possible. One was a values thing. Its basically, Los Angeles—what I would call Los Angeles values—versus Portland values. Commercial filmmaking values versus personal filmmaking values. So, part of it was a values thing, and part of it was simply fear, that... and this continued for a long time, was... I was... my relationship to the what I call the

commercial world, was very suspicious. A very suspicious relationship. I felt, I feared that that world wanted to impose; that if I got in a situation where I was working with people with different values, that they would attempt to impose their values upon me and I would end up making something that... was not valuable to me. So partly fear of, you, of... partly fear.

For example, in the ensuing videos, so the idea was to keep the production here, use local people because there are local people here who know how to do all of these things, and keep it, keep the other people away; keep the people who hired us—we're making something for them that's extra special; they should give us some space to make it. We know that what we're making is extra special. And they recognized it too, with the completion of the Talking Heads video which was this big smash, and from that point on, even though I had relationships with L.A. and I would sometimes shoot parts of things in L.A., it was understood that we produced these things here. And it was the rarest occasion where anyone from the production companies we were working with ever came here. That's how much trust they had. So I guess you can see what it is—it's an attempt to just keep it personal, as much as possible, throughout the whole process. Respect the fact that even though this person isn't, doesn't have a name—you know, this person working on your film, there's no name in the L.A. film industry for the task this person is carrying out, but that doesn't mean they can't carry it out. It was that kind of thing. It was sort of chip-on-shoulder, fear, and pursuing a values stream. That was kind of what that was about, and it just continued.

HP: What was the order... so you... *Suspicious Circumstances* led directly—because Melissa mailed the tape to Talking Heads—led to “And She Was,” which... that went into...[Jim starts to answer]?

JB: Oh. Oh, yeah. So the Talking Heads video led to a phone call from Warner Brothers Records. It was made just through Talking Heads' management, and Warner Brothers, who was the distributor for Sire I guess, and for Talking Heads, I guess that's how it goes, they didn't really have any—we didn't have any communications with them. But then Warner Brothers, a guy named Jeff Ayeroff at Warner Brothers who was the video guy and had... an amazing guy, with a lot of respect for artists working right smack in the middle of the record business. With real trust and belief in artists. Got a call from him that he wanted us to come down to L.A., so

rrr, rrr, rrr, rrr [indicating movement], you know, we were all watching this, watching the—we were all watching the first screening of “And She Was” on MTV, and MTV, once again, another thing which doesn’t make very much sense to maybe twenty-year-olds now, MTV was very adventurous at that time and really wanting things that were different. And kinda wild and woolly, you know, really not programmatic that much.

So Jeff Ayeroff calls and says, *You’re hot. We want you to come down to L.A. and meet with us. Oh... we’re “hot,” Melissa.* You know, you can’t even believe that anyone’s saying that about you? *And talk to you about directing some other things.* Oh... “directing.” They’re saying I’m a director. Because I think I’m a filmmaker. We go down to Warner Brothers and we meet with Jeff Ayeroff who presents himself—his office has one wall half torn out, with the studs showing, and that’s kind of his aesthetic—and then expensive chairs. So it’s very L.A., you know, expensive leather chairs and then one wall kind of half torn out, to reflect [chuckling] a down-to-earth kind of rock-and-roll aspect. Yeah, okay, so then we hop in the car and we go out to meet Joni Mitchell out at Malibu, and we have dinner there, and decide that, um, I’m actually so exhausted that even though I would love to make a video for Joni Mitchell, I... you know, we just worked for twenty-eight days hardly without sleeping. So anyway, we met with her, and that led to doing a video for Joni Mitchell, and then that led... oh, once again, back home, to doing a video for Nu Shooz.

A Portland-based band, Nu Shooz, who had a big dance hit, and, you know, it was... I suppose someone could say *Oh, well no, you should be working with more well-known people* or something like that, but no, it was “this is Portland.” Yeah, okay, so now we’re going to do a video with Nu Shooz, and I’m going to push improvisation as far as I can. I’m not going to... we’re going to set up a shooting date and a studio and I’m not going to give it one moment’s thought until that morning when it’s time to go over there. And so [coughs] and so that morning I... I put, somehow, I put our kitchen table and chair and our lamp from our house and some other things, coffee pot, and some other things in my car and went over to the shoot. There’s an account of this that a woman writes really quite nicely for a blog. And walked in, and met the band, and you know, by now, having done those two videos, and I’m established as a guy who... you let him do the things he wants, because that’ll be best. And so [smile in his voice] I remember standing in front of them, the whole crew and everybody, standing in front of them

saying [becoming serious] *Okay. Well, we're about ready, and I'm going to be back in ten minutes to tell you what we're going to do.* At which point I... and I still hadn't any idea.

And I walked down and I began looking at, you know they shot commercials at this place and so they had walls and they had backdrops and stuff, and I just began getting people to bring them out. Oh, and then... I think it was incorrect that I had no plan, because I had arranged for someone to bring their dog, and once we were down there we decided we needed a doghouse. So I sent some people over to basically steal the doghouse from some friends who were on vacation, and bring it over, and then I went out and I got a dumpster out of the yard, and we hooked the dumpster up with fishing line so it could go up and down, and we... Oh, and I brought some tools for Valerie, I thought she should have some repair tools to fix a—beginning to dawn on me, she needs to be fixing a coffee pot here, in this international dance hit. Needs to be really about small appliance repair, that would be best! [laughs] And so that happened, and then, huh, well, that was so funny, too.

See, this whole thing of, you know, I know that... okay, it was extremely exciting for me to be doing this work and being able to get a chance to do it; it was really exhilarating. And at the same time, I was very wary of the kind of celebrity enthusiasm that surrounded it. I suppose in a way, yes, I wanted to be recognized as the one who was doing the video for Talking Heads, and blah blah blah, but I was really not interested in being unnerved because there was a lot of, you know, phone calls coming from the newspapers and radio shows and stuff like that locally, and I would just not do it. Because it was distracting; because we're all susceptible to flattery and stuff, and I just wanted to be as normal as possible. How else am I going to be able to continue doing good work, you know? Hence the secret, of nobody's supposed to say that we're even working on it, and um... well, because the other reason for the secret is, was, *Oh, well what if somebody heard that we were working about it and called up Warner Brothers and told us that, told them that we didn't know what we were doing?* Because we weren't sure that we did. In a certain way, we knew we did, and in another way... it's... you know, Portland is not exactly the—was not at the time *exactly* the filmmaking capital of the world. At any rate, so that's another reason.

So like I say, partly it's values-based and partly it's fear of somebody stopping you or... I don't know, it's just... it was crazy! I just sat bolt upright one night in the middle of the night going, *Oh my God, did I say I could do this?* But, also I should say when I say "I," I mean all the

people. The animators, and artists, and art students, and so on who came in to work on these projects, you know. They came and they learned to animate if they didn't know how to animate, and many of them had cutting jobs and some of them had jobs designing backgrounds and things like that, so, this is definitely not me alone in a room. There's Melissa, who is just basically ring-mastering this entire thing, you know, we're up on big cranes shooting the tops of houses, this is Talking Heads again. Or I'm flying down to Dallas to meet David Byrne and photograph him in the backyard of this house that he's living in, and all this, so I mean... there's a lot of people involved. But yeah, there was kind of this, *Yikes, look what they're letting us do!* And, yeah, and so then we go down to L... so, Joni Mitchell; then we go down to L.A. and we meet Paul Simon in Jeff's office and then we go out to, for... they wanted us to do "You Can Call Me Al," this is off the *Graceland* album, but I wanted to do "Boy in the Bubble" because I just liked the drama, the drama of it; and then they, when we were sitting there, they said *Okay, you can do that one.* And then at some point... oh, we went out to New York and met Paul, went to his apartment and met him, and listened to "Boy in the Bubble" hugely loud, like musicians like to hear their music.

So then after that... the way this was going, you know, here are all of these well-known people. And I remember leaving a meeting at Warner Brothers and saying... and just having this feeling, *I believe I'm going to get a call from Peter Gabriel.* And sure enough, it wasn't long before a call comes through from Peter Gabriel who wants to talk to me about doing a video. So we did a, you know, and I don't say—I'm not saying that in—it sounds kind of [laughs] it's almost—there was something *rolling* here, and I was riding it, and I was a part of what was making it happen, but there was other stuff propelling it. I mean if you look at it, it's really, these are the people making the hits, and they want this guy, who is making stuff that's unusual and that nobody's ever seen, and they're also kind of adventurous people, you know, they're not corporate. They're not corporate rockers or anything—they're artists that make their own decisions for them.

So then we do this Peter Gabriel piece, and we shoot it here, we replicate England sort of, you know, here, and shoot it here, with all local crews and stuff, and then... then I guess, was it after that that we get a call about doing a Michael Jackson video? Yeah, so it was after that that we get a call about doing a Michael Jackson video from Jerry Kramer in L.A. So pretty soon we're into doing this really complicated cut-out animation. It was cut-out... we had gone into

doing digital, into digital compositing, but when it came time to do the Michael Jackson one, we were back to doing cut-out. So it was just like the exceeding primitive “And She Was,” only we’re now making this thing based on movie film and we’re cutting out every frame on prints and stuff like that. So we did the Michael Jackson piece, and it was a big smash, and then the next one we did was for Tears for Fears, “Sowing the Seeds of Love,” another big international band. And they came out here, you know, as much as possible.

We shot Michael Jackson’s video in L.A. simply because given that I thought, *Well, if he’s got an entourage and so on, that will be harder to host, so let’s just go there.* But like when Paul Simon came out, he just came up with his sport coat on a hanger. And likewise, the Tears for Fears guys were very down-to-earth people, and they, you know, smart and interesting, and down-to-earth, and they showed up with a couple of other people. Yeah, and so then after that—so we did that. And then a video for Mark Cohn, a singer-songwriter, and then a video for another group who I can’t mention, because there were some intrigues involved with this video. That all got resolved [pauses] but... that had to do with the question, as their manager raised it, *People love this band! Why would you want to make this video be about the Gulf War?* You know, so... yeah. So, we finished it, and then somebody re-cut it, and it was... It was, in many ways, an artificial—every aspect of it was, in a way, a kind of a fabrication... so... including even how closely held the politics of the song were and stuff, and so it was kind of ev—it was really a, it was different from the other ones. It was something I did because I persuaded them to let me make it be about real world politics. There was a big long research phase that would be like something you would do for a PBS documentary or something, with pulling in all this documentary footage and things like this from Panama and the Gulf War and all kinds of things.

Yeah. And then that was really the last video that I did, and... with the exception of a Weird Al Yankovic video that I did with Marilyn Zornado about four years ago. Which was on a totally different scale, and I did it at my computer with found footage that I brought off the Internet and... it was lots—and some students from the Art Institute doing some animation for it. It was lots of fun to do, and the budget was about what you might have spent on lunches for the other shoots or something like that, it was an extremely tiny budget, you would almost laugh when I said the number. But, we did it anyway. Yeah.

And then also, during that time I also was doing commercials. So this shows you how your career can go off in some odd directions, because up to the time that I started doing

commercials, and certainly at CMI, but really, anywhere you talked to me I would not be speaking highly of commercials as something that artists ought to be doing. I thought that it was a form of selling out in which the people with the talents and abilities to be doing constructive things within their culture had just been bought off by the moneyed people, and were just selling out. For quite a long time, I actually, I resi—as soon as we started doing the music videos, the ad agencies started calling, and we would just say *No, we're not interested in doing that*. And we were very consistent about that. And then somewhere along the line, Wieden+Kennedy, who are local, talked to me. And they seemed very supportive, they seemed to—Wieden+Kennedy is rather different than a lot of ad agencies, even though they are basically doing what I just said. But they were clearly going to, to let us do something in which my values came through. So we did some commercials, we did some spots for universal remote controls; back in a time when remote controls were something you spent a lot of money on and stuff. And, you know, they were, Don Merck and Bill Will did most of the work on them. But they were funny, they were absurd, and... then after that, sometime after that, I... my producer, Paul Diener, who works for Laika, left to go get a job where they would actually pay you a decent salary. And Melissa had been the producer, Melissa had been the producer of the early videos and things that we did, and then Paul... and then Paul Diener was hired on from Vinton where he had been an editor, but I knew him and hired him as a producer. He came in and produced several things, including the Michael Jackson video, and then... all along, there were various people who were really central to it. Melissa Stewart—Missy Stewart—who's been a production designer starting with Gus' [Van Sant's] films and then for all kinds of... *Legally Blonde* and things like that. Who is just a wonderful person to work with, a lot of skills, just really good at ten million things. She was really central to a lot of the production surrounding even the commercials.

So a certain point at which I started doing commercials, and so I did commercials for Pepsi, and I did commercials for Nike, and I did commercials for Kellogg's, and others, you know, all of... here we are, with the, now the big names of corporate cereal! And I did it because I just decided, well—I did it for the reasons that people do things like that; it was convenient to do so. And it would allow me to get some money in my pocket. And so I did it, and said, [coughing]... I did it, acknowledging all the way that I'm doing something now that is actually contrary to my values. I don't believe, as some people say, that commercials are the best thing on television; I don't believe that commercials really are an art form; I believe that they're a

corrupted... a corruption of potential art, they're highly crafted, yes, some of them are funny, some of them have wonderful scenes in them, there are all kinds of things, but they're basically telling little lies to people in order to separate them from their money, and that's their function. [coughs] And I'm doing it because I find it convenient to do so. And, while we're doing it, we'll make the very best commercials that we can. We'll really do a good job on the part of our clients; we will not act cynical about it; we will... we'll do our work. That's what we did there for a while. Kind of mixed in a little bit toward the end of the music video period.

That more or less ended a long, long time ago. That ended like in... I think the last video I did other than Weird Al was in '92, and the last commercial I did was in something like '96. And so then, it was interesting because it is an experience to have gone on that ride and then find yourself kind of, *Hmm, where is the land, here? Wonder what I even want to be?* Oh, also, way back in there somewhere between the last couple of music videos we did a play. Victoria Parker and I did a play... some other things. Yeah, so then this period, you know... yeah, it was a little floaty in there up until about 2000, and then I started doing installations. One thing I was interested in that I hadn't done was doing multiple-screen video installations, and I wanted to do them, and so I got some projectors and I just started playing around and seeing—learning, and so on, and did... the first piece I did, I think maybe was for the PDX film festival on the corner of Art Media, the corner of the Art Media building for several nights. We cleared out everything and did this piece with multiple screens, and a chair, and so on, called "Running Dog with Cactus."

And then I did a piece in Las Vegas for... it was, heh, it was a... over Fremont Street, they have this big screen on the ceiling, which probably everybody has seen one way or another, maybe in news, on the TV or something, but it's four blocks wide and forty some feet wide. So there's an arts commission in Las Vegas, quite separate from the casinos, just kind of an arts commission, you know, with artists and painters and stuff, and they have a competition to make something for that big screen, which usually has like promos for the casinos on it. But it's really kind of a cool... kind of a cool format, because it's extremely long and skinny and big. So I made a piece there, for them, called... it was going to be called "Lucy on the Skylight with Hiram," but it ended up being called... well, let's see. It had a name, and I'm going to tell you what it is. Um... oh, "Dream of the Scarlet C—" It ended up being called "Dream of the Scarlet Crustaceans." And it was a pretty cool piece. It was up there for a while. And then, oh and I did a

piece for the Experience Music Project, you know, that was another thing, when the Experience Music Project started to kind of come into awareness as a thing that was happening, I thought *Jeez, I should be involved in this*. I got some kind of call from them, and I ended up doing this really nice piece, Zak Margolis and I, Zak who also worked on the “Dream of the Scarlet Crustaceans.” A really nice piece, a collaboration with the music of Bill Frisell, called “The Lone Ranger.”

And then, oh, and then working with the Liminal performance group, where we did this piece called “The Resurrectory,” which was a performance piece... it was a lot of things, but among the things, it was a performance piece, a kind of movement piece that was about medical practices in 18th-century Scotland. So I devised... there was a cadaver, and I did projections on this cadaver. We cast an entire person in plaster and made a mold of a person, and put it under a sheet and so on, it was a cadaver and there’s this man giving a lecture—giving a medical lecture made up of fragmented texts, sort of in William Burroughs fashion, having to do with poetic notions and medical terms. And he’s singing and there’s a six-piece orchestra along the way, and then in the middle of the room the murders are being recreated, because it... the murders were to get bodies for medical research when it was illegal, and Burke and Hare would go out and kill indigents and bring their bodies in and sell them. They had records about... the police had records about how each person had died, and so the performance people were in a sense reproducing the manner in which they had died. But those too, the movement director had taken those and chopped—and kind of sliced them up, too, so they were rather fragmented. And then off in another corner, someone was gathering data, and the whole thing was dark and had hay on the floor, and I had this really cool slideshow going up above the cadaver, which was quite a reflection of the level of coherence of the lectures and so on, you know, slideshows. It was really cool, and the typefaces were all mixed-up, and it was... it used phrases pulled out of the songs and stuff and then over in the corner was just water dripping into a sink. So anyway, that was an attempt to kind of expand and make an environment.

And then about six years ago [Don Merck?] and I, or, I, and invited, [Don Merck?] responded to a request for a... an installation in Seattle, which is called “Circulator,” which is a multiple-screen piece. And then I did a piece for the Port of Portland, which is a contemplative multiple-screen piece that’s really kind of about the conveyance of thought and the conveyance of things—it’s called “Conveyor.” And I’m getting ready to work on a video installation that’s

going to go on the new bridge that's going across, here, there's going to be four of these kind of machines; it's called "Flooded Data Stream"—it's called "Flooded Data Stream"... no, excuse me, it's called "Flooded Data Machine Replica." And, so that's, we're back working on that now. We did some of the preliminary design for it, and it's...

HP: The new interstate bridge?

JB: No, there's a new bridge that's going in between the Marquam Bridge and the Ross Island Bridge, which is going to be for light rail, buses, streetcars, pedestrians, and bikes. And go all the way to Milwaukie. So, I'm doing some work on that. And I have a, I've made a couple of little films recently, or, last fall I made a film called *Vanity* which I think I showed you. And I've got some kind of semi-narrative film going for the last couple of years, I'm not quite sure what it's going to... what will become of it, really.

Yeah, so that's kind of where I am. Right now I'm installing the "Circulator" piece, which is about the ecosystem as expressed through water moving through a hole in the floor, a hole in the wall, in numerous screens along the wall. All these pieces are, they're commissioned pieces, they're public art, and once again, I believe that I am managing to do personal work, or work that is, you know, mostly personal, that serves its function but that can kind of have it both ways. It's the same with those videos. The videos had a function, it was to, it was, they're ads, basically, and they were to publicize a new song by a certain person, and I learned somewhere along the way that if you are conscientious about that function, that I could do all kinds of things. As long as I was doing that. So, and I think this is a little bit—these are, these, I think these public art installations are a little bit like that. I'm trying to keep them kind of in the realm of the heart and the interior of the being. I like them to speak kind of in those ways in these public places, you know. So. So that's what I'm up to.

HP: So, I have a quick question, just clarifying a couple of things. What is Melissa's last name?

JB: Melissa's last name is Marsland. M-A-R-S-L-A-N-D.

HP: Is she the same Melissa Marsland that worked with Martha Gies at Northwest Media Project?

JB: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

HP: Were you part of the Northwest Media Project?

JB: Yeah, I was on the board of the Northwest Media Project, when it... well, you know the story there. Yeah, and so Melissa came to work there, and I met Melissa, and then... then [pausing] then it was me and Melissa. So she worked on these, she worked on, well... So she worked with Martha at the Media Project, and we were doing all those Media Project things, and then she had her own business for a while, kind of... I guess you might call it event management now, as a freelancer. And then she, then we got into doing the music videos and she produced the first maybe three or, well, several of them. And then she didn't want to do that anymore, and then she went to work for Vinton and became a producer over there on *Gary & Mike* and some of the TV shows they were doing. Then she... just the, the long hours, you know, and the sort of brutality of production sort of got to her, and she went back to school and got her teaching certificate, and she's been teaching Spanish for the last ten years, which is... Spanish and Mexican culture is one of her great loves; her sister lives in Mexico and... she, she introduced me to Mexico, and our daughter has friends in the village in Mexico. So anyway, that's what Melissa's up to. She's busy being a teacher at Roosevelt High School.

HP: You and Melissa... married?

JB: Yeah.

HP: Oh. I didn't... I didn't know!

JB: Yeah.

HP: Okay. When you said “our daughter,” I’m like *Wait a second*. Okay. Going back to what you had said about Lori Meeker, you mentioned you had taught her in high school? So did you teach...?

JB: Well, I became an artist-in-residence right after... or was it before... I taught part-time for a year at Portland State, and either right before it or right after it I [clearing throat] I became an artist-in-residence through the Oregon Arts Commission, for two years at Cleveland High School. And the first year, it was a part-time, half-time job, and the second time it was a full—the second year it was full-time, and I was working with a teacher named Marsha Carpenter who was the filmmaking teacher there and I had a room that was my own studio and I had a little budget, so I was able to, you know, all of those films that I was talking about that I would go up to see at the Bellevue Film Festival that really subverted your understanding of what a film was? I had one whole day where we showed them for about eight or ten hours those very same films, you know, that would cause students to come up and say things like “*Mr. Blashfield, is something wrong with the projector?*” I think that for a lot of the students it was just an amazing thing for them to sit there and watch all of these things that these film artists had made. Yeah. So, I did that.

And then I... and then I worked in Artist in the Schools for about, off and on, for about eight years or something like that. Sometimes we would be making films with students at ten different schools a week. We would actually go to two different schools, my assistant and I, Robert, would go to two different schools a day, we had ten ongoing projects for maybe six or eight weeks, and the schools were just scattered all over the Portland metropolitan area. But we did it, and we were making these little films with the kids. Some of them were second grade and some of them were high school.

I did that, oh, I was a co-editor and art director, I guess, we didn’t give ourselves names, at the *Clinton Street Quarterly* from oh, from the late seventies up to... maybe from about 1980 up to about 1984. And that was a, you know... and I did cartoons. All throughout this I was doing posters, and cartoons, and graphic design... The *Clinton Street* was really great, though, because I got to design all the spreads, and I got to... and the covers, and... I got to... you know who Lynda Barry is? Well, you know, well, we had a publication, so I got to go up and interview Lynda Barry up in Seattle and write an article about her. Stuff like that. And write, I would write

funny little bogus ads, you know, and I would... if I'd drawn a cartoon and we had some space I would stick it in there. It was really fun.

HP: When you were doing that did a lot of people already know you pretty well for your posters for Fillmore West? Did you do that from Portland also?

JB: No, um... oh, the posters for the Fillmore. In January of 1967, Peggy Lindquist, later Peggy Blashfield, and I moved to San Francisco for our, you know, "twenty-one-year-olds on a life adventure" experience. We moved to San Francisco right before the so-called Summer of Love. And we moved to within two blocks of Haight Street, we right on the... right on the park panhandle and it was a wild summer. But as soon as I got there... oh, and she had friends who had a flat on Cole and Fell Street, and so that's where she was going to live and where I ingratiated myself into living. But as soon as I got there, I had no idea what the scene was that was going on down there. I'd never heard the word "hippie" before in my life. In fact, I mean it wasn't a common term, up until more or less the instant... I was telling someone the evening we got—Peggy and I got there—and went up to the flat where Peggy was going to live, their friends came home and there were a couple of guys there with some of Peggy's young women friends, and the guys were saying, *Well, I suppose if people have to be called something, I guess "hippie" is okay. I guess it...* you know, Herb Caen or somebody, the columnist, had dreamed up the name for the long-haired people, and had put it in the newspaper. So like that very month or week or something it was up for discussion. So, I didn't know anything about it, or any of the ramifications of it or anything. I do remember arriving there in my—I had a TR-3 sports car convertible with a big duffel bag on the back trunk, and I remember my typewriter right under my legs, you know, right in here in this little space here, and Peggy's stuff all, everything all jammed in this, and arriving in San Francisco just in time to see cops ushering a whole bunch of people out of a Victorian house with the lights going around and around. *Well, those clearly are being arrested, but for what,* you might ask?

So anyway, right about then, right, you know, the posters had become a big part, the rock posters had become a big part of the Fillmore. There were two main venues there, the Fillmore and the Family Dog were the two main, big concert promoters. And so these posters, I'd never seen anything like them. I decided, *I want to make them.* We went down there to go to college...

[laughs] ...allegedly. So I started drawing posters with a felt pen, being very inspired by Wes Wilson, who was to me the coolest guy, he was the one that did the very organic ones in the most expert way. He did them for the Fillmore a very long time, and I wanted to do them too. But, a little bit like making a video for Talking Heads or something, what made me think anyone wanted me to make these posters? I'd never drawn a poster before. I mean, I'd always drawn cartoons, but I could see that I wasn't supposed to make them funny. I could see that. [laughing] At least not in an obvious way. But, so I drew them, and worked on... as only a twenty-one-year-old can, you know, really basically copying someone else's style as best you could without really realizing that you were copying, because you're not very old and you're just doing something cool. Maybe more like you'd think a fifteen-year-old would do or something, but at any rate.

So, through the door of our flat lived Jack Casady, the bass player for the Jefferson Airplane, and he lived through there, through the door, and he was managed by Bill Graham, who ran the Fillmore Auditorium. So he would see me doing these drawings, and one day he said, *If you want to do posters for the Fillmore, I could mention your name to Bill Graham.* And I went, *You could what?!* And, heh... I was so excited, I was vibrating to death, you know, and I kept waiting to get a call or something, and no call came, because as it turned out later Jack hadn't really gotten around to it. But it did cause me to just pick up the phone and call, right, more or less on the day or week that Wes Wilson and Bill Graham had parted company. And I went down there and I showed him my little drawings, and he had me draw... he said, *Here's what I'd like you to do,* and had me draw something up, and I came back and showed it to him, and he had me change one thing in it, and then... I was making Fillmore posters! You know? *Whoa! There's my poster on the wall! Look, and it's on the telephone poles!* Yeah. It was really exciting. So I made maybe, maybe I made... I don't know how many I made for them, maybe really only seven or eight or something like that. And then when I moved back to Portland, and, you know, posters for Jefferson Airplane, Grateful Dead, the Doors, Big Brother and Holding Company and on and on, you know, those ones. And then when I came back to Portland, you know, people found out that I'd been making Fillmore posters, so I made some more posters here, and did that for awhile—while trying to go to school and doing things. I worked at OMSI for a while, in maybe '69 or something like that. Yeah.

HP: I just have two more questions. I ask these—the same two questions I basically ask everybody as I end: if *you* were writing a history of CMI, how would you... what would you consider important; how would you... basically what would you consider important?

JB: Well, I think I've already said it. It was basically the influence that they had on me and a whole bunch of people. You know, it was really incredibly eye-opening to have people talking to you about film in some way other than related to entertainment. In such a thoughtful way, that was so tied-in to social issues. And the other thing is that it gave people a chance to make films. You'd get your hands on films, or get your hands on equipment, take the class, get your hands on equipment and go make films, you know, because the equipment wasn't that easy to get your hands on either, and that was part of their, part of what they wanted to do. It's interesting, their goal... it wasn't just theirs, it was kind of part of the social thing at the time but, looking forward to the day when making a film will be as easy as writing with a pencil would be one thing he talked about. But no one could quite imagine how that was going to come about, you know, when video started to come on the scene—when would that have been, way back in the mid-seventies or something like that—you could see that there was something there, but still nobody could afford. I mean, we were, we were paying huge amounts of money to rent video cameras and stuff like that, whose quality wasn't anywhere near a decent five-hundred-dollar consumer camera now. Huge amounts of money to edit and stuff. But at any rate, [coughing] yeah, that's what we thought. [coughs]

And while it's not absolutely true, it's certainly true that, you know, well, for all but the poorest or most isolated people, you can get your hands on a video camera, and you can have control of media, of making media. Which was, once again, there's one of those core values: Power to the people, meaning the people should be making their own films, and so on. You know, I don't think we could have imagined the shape it would have taken, that it has taken now, that the democracy has created a... well, it's created all kinds of things, ranging from utter chaos and disorganization to just exactly what it should be, loads of opportunities for people with things to say. Who would have ever guessed? I mean, there was as little as maybe... I don't know how long ago, maybe six years ago or something, before... whenever... before YouTube. When did YouTube come on? Anyway, somewhere right before YouTube showed up, that it was dawning on me that anyone with access to a server could have their own television show on the

internet. But it was before there was any... my assumption was, I didn't even quite know what a server was, but my assumption was that for several thousand dollars you could probably go get the stuff you needed to make a show every week or whatever you model was, and put it online. I mean, that was an absolute, you know, and I said it to this group of students, I said *Isn't that true?* And they all went...[silence]. I mean, because there was no model. And then suddenly, I would never have guessed that it would be a big business that would show up that was just going to host everybody's films and make, really, it is the case, anybody that wants to go to the trouble can get a... who really wants to work hard, can get attention on YouTube, I think. At least the potential is there. Go do the best work you want... it was interesting to me because it makes you kind of show your, uh... what's the word? Reveal yourself, because, you know you might say, *well, if it weren't so damned expensive, and hard, I would really like to have like a regular something-or-other that I put out there. Boy, wouldn't it be great if it were just cheap, or free, and we could just do it?* But then, once... I mean, that is the case, we could set up your camera right now and make ourselves a television show, but we've got other things to do right now. So that was interesting.

You know, you realize how much of it... *access* was one of the elements, and then, then there's other elements too, which... some people are really jumping on it, and others are playing around. CMI was... I mean, this is useful, it's kind of roundabout, but CMI was a reflector of and conveyor of those political values of media being created by the peop—the average people, at a time... You know, so many of these things that are influential. Someone says it to you and you go, *yeah, sure*. But because it's become so dominant now, in a way, in a way, I mean there's still... well, anyway.

HP: You've mentioned a couple of times, and you're not the first person to mention, the idea of film as an agent of social change through CMI? — [JB: Yeah.] Do you personally believe, and has your career proven to you that film can be in agent for social change?

JB: Ooh. Let's see. Well, it's very evident to me that moving images are a huge agent for social change; whatever direction... regardless of the direction, extremely powerful for creating mores and behaviors, and understandings of, and misunderstandings, and all kinds of things. It's such an interesting question. I mean, that's obvious, but then you start to get into, okay, you know,

access is available, how committed are you to using the access; what do you need to do to rise up above the noise, do you need to—once again, you know, do you need to do exploitative things, or gimmicky things, in order to get up above the noise? What kind of compromises do you need to make? Or is it enough to simply do things well, and get them up there and promote them?

This media environment we're in is a very interesting one, and there's a lot of relatively young people that... well, maybe age isn't even... well, there are groups of people that seem to understand it really well, you know, the interrelatedness of all of the... of everything. Of all the media, social media, other media... the really strange and interesting aspect to make sure that all media is social media, and, um... stuff like that. I wouldn't say... yeah. It's an interesting question.

And whether me, myself, like anything I've done well, you know, I do think, I think that... I'm glad I made the steamboat film with Jack. It's historical; it... before I made that, I had no awareness that I was interested in history in any sort of way, and so that was transformative for me; it made me interested. To travel around with Jack, who had much more, you know, inherent interest in history, and we'd go find this place where there used to be a wheat mill that shot bags of wheat down onto barges. We'd seen pictures of it from our OHS pictures and stuff, and you're standing there right where it was. And you look and you can see there's some evidence that a hundred years ago or seventy years ago or eighty years ago, *Look, there was something there*. And to be in a place and knowing that it has several identities simultaneously and trying to figure out what that even means to you, if anything, is it deep, or is it just mysterious, or what the hell is it? That was all... it was good for me. I presume the film was useful, interesting to people, and helped them to understand that places have other identities.

I'd like to say that I think art... art that influences people and takes them to worthwhile places, provokes them in ways, kind of jiggles their brains around a little bit, has its merits and is good. I'm not making any great claims for... claims; but I do know that [pausing to consider] you know, that I had in mind as an artist with the videos and with my films to just have people look at the things around them and to [pausing to consider] see that... that that's... that there's something to look at in places where maybe you thought there wasn't anything to look at. [pausing to consider] I don't know if I did any... I do know that the videos have influenced and affected people. I do know that. And put little buzzing things in certain people's minds that have stayed with them for a very long time. And, you know, good! [laughs]

HP: Do you have any final comments on CMI, Deinum, Taylor, any of your work, anything about the future?

JB: Hm-mm. No. I hope I've said it on behalf of CMI. You know, the thing that I just said. It was very important that it be there as a reflector and a provocateur or reflector of culture, and a... an affector of values, I guess. I've said it all. But I mean, when I think about what would have happened had that, had those impulses or the... whatever the power hadn't been there, you know, there would have... well, you wouldn't notice what wasn't there, because it wouldn't have been there, but... For these social values, among other things, to be able to be planted in among the social rethinking that was going on at the time, in an orderly kind of—in a sort of orderly way—a systematic, thoughtful way, was great.

And of course, like a lot of, I think, like a lot of things like that, you know, Deinum, here we're in 1971 or '72 or something and we've got, Tom Taylor might have been forty, and Deinum might have been fifty or something like that. So we have people—and then around them are all these long-haired people who are shutting the campus down and stuff like this. There's all this stuff going on, political stuff, and Deinum's hardly a hippie or even a... he's hardly a radical, I mean he doesn't fit the stereotype of the seventies whatsoever, but here he is, his very person very centered on a set of values; influencing whole bunches of people who are a couple of generations away, just through his centeredness. And likewise, Tom, in a completely different per—well, a very different personality—just being the action. The daily, practical action as well as a carrier of values. A very determined person. [pause] Yeah. There are probably lots of — well, I know there are. Lots of movements that have had that person from the previous generation guiding and mentoring. That's a pretty... [slowing down] worthwhile role. You've made me very thoughtful with this conversation; thanks, it's pretty good!

HP: Thank you.