

Robert Stein
2591 Military Avenue Los Angeles, CA 90064 (213) 473-1485

October 2, 1981

Mr. Charles Van Doren
The Encyclopaedia Britannica
425 North Michigan Ave.
Chicago, IL 60611

Dear Mr. Van Doren:

I thought you might enjoy seeing the enclosed letter. Both the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian were quite enthusiastic about my recent visit. Representatives of both institutions expressed a keen interest in pursuing with EB the possibility of programs along the lines we have discussed. Mr. Durant was quite helpful with the Smithsonian and I thank you for the lead.

Aside from the two meetings above, I held a number of other interesting discussions when I was back east with varied and sundry people. Everyone seemed to be genuinely interested and excited by the projects we are considering and the approach we are taking. I was particularly encouraged by a meeting I had with a corporate 'strategist' from Xerox who expressed considerable interest in the idea of participating with EB on a major electronic publishing venture. I'll have more to say about this in the report. Other meetings of note were with Peter Derow, the new president of the CBS Publishing Group, a representative from the Children's Television Workshop (Sesame Street), and Dr. Peter Schillaci of ABC's Wide World of Learning. I wasn't all that impressed with his description of the Schooldisc Program, but they are moving full-speed ahead and may singlehandedly build the educational market for the laserdisc on the elementary school level. I had a very congenial discussion with Fred Hechinger of the Times. He had some very interesting insights -- and sends his regards.

One more thing. I had an opportunity to talk with Prof. Negroponte while you were engrossed in the demonstration, so I don't think you heard him assure me that there should be no problem putting significant amounts of digital information on the videodisc. They have done it at MIT and he sees no reason why it shouldn't be viable with mass produced discs. This is wonderful news for some of the applications that EB will be interested in a few years from now, eg. with an electronic/video Compton's or the like.

Well, back to the report.

Bob

"The 'Videobook' of Lists"

Among other things, the laserdisc presents us with the first true video-based "browser's medium." As with a book, the viewer can go to any segment, in any order, pausing as briefly or as long as desired. The Book of Lists format, developed by David Wallechinsky and Irving Wallace is an information browser's delight#and is particularly well-suited for adaptation to videodisc.

Following are several examples of list categories that would be exceptionally interesting to see presented visually, either in live action or as color photos. The items marked with an asterisk have appeared in one or another of the Wallechinsky/Wallace books.

- 10 Most spectacular baseball plays (captured on film)
- 10 Most exotic real-estate properties*
- Prehistoric things still alive today*
- Most intelligent robots -- at work
- 10 Most important events (captured on film), such as the moon landing, Kennedy assassination, 1st nuclear explosion)
- Most expensive automobiles
- Rarest comics (using individual frames you could show the entire comic, or portions)*
- Most Controversial plays in sports (captured on film)
- Rarest Stamps*
- 7 Wonders of the world, ancient, middle ages, modern, future*

The Book of Lists success has shown that people derive pleasure just from reading a brief description of the items in a category, or in some cases only the names. For example with "Rarest stamps," "Prehistoric things alive today," or "Most exotic real-estate properties," the Book of Lists presented only the names of the items. Being able to look at the stamps, or pictures of the animals etc. would clearly be a lot more fun (and more educational).

Both Book of Lists and Book of Lists II have been on the Best Seller lists. Book of Lists III is on the way.

"Trip to New York"

The point of this disc would be to apply the concept of vicarious travel as developed in the Aspen Movie Map and some of the Kidisc segments to a major U.S. city. This modern "travelogue" would be a highly entertaining and educational adventure.