

L y n n S l o a n

It is March third, 1998. This is an interview with Lynn Sloan of the Photography Department at Columbia College.

If I could start the interview and ask you, when did you come to Columbia and what were the circumstances that brought you here?

Well, I started teaching at Columbia teaching what a still [photography] class would teach. It's a Saturday, all-day, Photography I course, an introduction to the Photography Department. And I started teaching that class because I ran into the guy who had been the chair of the Photography Department standing on the El. And we were waiting for the Ravenswood El and he said, "What are you doing?" And I was picture editing Encyclopedia Britannica at that time. We had known in each other in graduate school and he said, "I need someone to teach a Saturday Photography I class. Can you do it?" And I said, "Sure, I'd love to do it." And so I began. Columbia, at that time, 1974, was on Ohio Street, 540 East Ohio. And the Photography Department's offices, I forget what floor they were on. It was up several flights of stairs, it may have been the second or the third. And we shared an office with the Film Department. We were a very tiny school then and the secretary, whom we always had liked, was kind of on the edge of a nervous breakdown because there was so many people coming in and out. The chair of the Photography Department and the chair of the Film Department shared this one sort of central space.

And, actually, Charlie Traub wasn't the chair of Photo then, it was Jimmy Newberry. Charlie was, I guess, the point man looking for new faculty to teach the Saturday class. And he later became the chair but actually it was Jim Newberry who was the actual chair. And it was a small department, mostly men. I may have been the only woman teaching at that point. It was Jim Newberry, Doug Baz... Charlie Traub, Barry Burlison, Dave Avison, Brian Katz, and Jim Newberry, the chair. And I started teaching the Saturday class and then we needed someone to pick up another class during the day for the following semester, and then the department really burgeoned. It was, by now, the mid '70s, and photography was just a blooming art field. And the department's class offerings expanded enormously and they needed more full-time faculty. And they put out a search or a call for an application process: I put mine in. And there was a search and I was happily hired full-time. So I quit doing my other work and began teaching full-time at Columbia, and I kept some of the professional activities going, but I no longer did picture editing at that time.

How would you describe Columbia beyond the department, as well as kind of the atmosphere of the College at that stage?

Well, it was much more playful, maybe because it was smaller and we all knew each other. For example, just the Photography and the Film Department sharing offices led to a lot more, not interdisciplinary courses, but a lot more sharing of information, of playfulness, of things going on together. That was

particularly true with Photography and Film. The Art Department sort of sprang out of the Photography Department at that time. And so actually, there were no art classes, no History of Art classes being taught, and we felt a need for them in Photo. And so the first Art History classes were taught in the Photography Department. And one of our members, Barry Burlison, a Photo teacher, started teaching Two-Dimensional Design and some Drawing classes because we felt visual artists in photography needed more of a visual background. And so the Art Department sort of sprang out [of photography]. It's now twice, four times the size of Photography, but at that point it sprang out of Photo. And that sort of thing happened a lot. People saw a need for something on the curriculum and just advanced the idea. Mike was very enthusiastic about just anything. You know, it's this idea of—there's also a Mickey Rooney atmosphere to this school: Let's put



on a show, let's put on an Art Department, let's put on a gallery. And there's so much liveliness to that. When there were social parties I remember you would invite everybody from the school who was a full-timer. So everyone knew each other. There was just a lot of—I wouldn't even call it cross-fertilization, it was just your gang, your friends. All the faculty sort of got together all the time. It was a very lively place.

And there was no need for interdisciplinary because it just happened. I remember a course that I taught at that time that had three faculty for maybe eight students. It was Jamie Bright, myself, and Barry Burlison. And the class was called Figure and Environment. I think it was 1976 that we taught this class. And we had some fabulous students in the class. Every two weeks we would take the students for a two-day film trip somewhere and photograph with them. We went to Louisville, Kentucky; we went to downstate Illinois; we went to the South Side of Chicago; sometimes, when we went far away we took sleeping bags and we arranged sort of temporary housing in various places. And when it was on the South Side of Chicago, we'd all just go home and then meet there at the factory the next day. And three faculty teaching eight students; each of us had our own different area. Jim Newberry, the chair at that time, his area was symbolist art. And so actually, he didn't usually go on the shooting. Barry and I did most of the taking the people on the field trips. This class went on field trips every two weeks, but in the off-week we would meet and just have six to eight hours of visual stimulation: movies, slides, films, things that

seem to be related to the idea of figure and environment, stimulating sessions. It was a tremendously good experience. And many of the people in that class have gone on to do wonderful things. Perhaps one of our most famous graduates was Ruth Thorne-Thompson, who was an undergraduate in that class—everyone was undergraduate then—was a student at that time in that Figure and Environment class. That kind of thing that's just a great idea: we have three people, we've got different talents, different abilities, let's put us together and see what happens. And what happened is wonderful. So, that kind of thing happened a lot. There was not the kind of bureaucracy and need for curriculum and textbooks and so on that are, you know, now are very much a part of the school.

That would make it impossible to offer that kind of class?

Oh, not impossible to offer it. Now, I think what makes it almost impossible to invent such neat and exciting classes is that we're all, all full-time faculty, are so involved with so much other work that we don't have the energy or the time to put in to developing as many new classes as we might like to. And that class actually just sprang up. I don't remember what, how long the term was between genesis and execution, but it was pretty short. I'm sure it was in June we said, "Hey, let's do this this Fall." And it was something like that. We didn't have to go through a lot of review. And yet, there's no doubt about the excellence of that class. I mean, everyone in that class, Jay Borsno was in that class—I think he's now chair of the Photography department at Governor's State, Lisa Thompson has an exhibition—she was in that class. If I were going to look at those eight people, at least check with them, they are

some of our most outstanding students. And so, it was a very happy collection of exciting students, good teachers, and a real genesis, a real generative experience.

Maybe you could, I was gonna get back to this later, but maybe now is a good time to talk about what has changed for full-time faculty members, that it sounds like your energy has been diverted to what the institution or the growth of the institution demands. What are some of the circumstances that have taken your time elsewhere over, you know, the past twenty, twenty-five years?

You know, I think it's a number of things that have happened. At that time, in the early days of Columbia, it was seen as extremely important that all the faculty have exciting, creative careers. And what was thought of was the best thing that we brought to the classroom was the energy from our careers. And as a measure of that—this may sound odd—but it was typical not to show up for class until fifteen minutes before the class began. And it may sound irresponsible and lenient, but in truth it really wasn't. People just came in with their own ideas and slides and pictures and energy: We're gonna go down to this museum today, where gonna go to that. Now, because of a number of things—first off, the administrative load is tremendous. There's the need for a lot of checks to make sure the faculty is doing the right thing and also, the students that we are getting are younger, and they expect a lot of organization; the school expects a lot of organization. So now, the three weeks before the semester begins is typically spent—you know, all but nine to five—for

me sitting down at a computer and in a library writing syllabuses, writing introductions to classes, ordering books, organizing the Xeroxing, making curricular changes as I see the need to, working out the calendar for classes. That's three weeks that is spent setting up classes. And if I have a new class that's really wholly new readings, much of that has been done previously, and in addition to the regular three weeks to set everything up. So, a tremendous amount goes into just making it regular so that the first week of class I go in with very elaborate syllabuses. This gives students the confidence that the course is going to go as it should. It also means that there's so much less room for moving things around. It's not that we don't, but a visiting artist comes in, I just say, "Now we're gonna break from the syllabus. Today we have an opportunity to do something else." But invariably there will be a few students who say, "But I thought..." And get a little miffed because the schedule is now, you know, has its own engine. So part of it is the kind of students we get, they're younger, society as a whole has become so much more regularized and so much more put down in paper. I mean, this paper, this office, this rubbish—I've never produced more papers at the computer. I can't imagine producing more paper. When the Xerox machine goes down, it's a crisis, you know, quick phone calls and notes. So the whole society has grown to be more paper-based. Certainly, the institution is asking for tremendously more of our time as teachers and as administrators. So when I first began to teach here, it was entirely possible to keep a creative career going during the

school year. You could, very easily, arrange shooting assignments, days in the darkroom. Now a day in the darkroom, if I could do that once a month, you know, it would be just, that's the best I could do is one day a month in the darkroom. And shooting, I try to do that a little bit now and then on weekends, but what I take to the class is way less of that kind of energy and excitement about my own work because it's really at a simmer rather than a boil. That's one of the downsides of becoming more of a regular college.

So, becoming—as you say—more of a regular college, but do you think that, could what Columbia was in the late '60s, early '70s, through he '70s, could that be recreated or was that a product of its time? You know, did that happen just at that point in history or..

Some things we can't go back to. I mean, part of this paper business is really what all schools need for checks and balances. You know, there are teachers who are ill-prepared and one of the things about all this paperwork, it makes sure that everyone's sort of on the same professional level of teaching. But I think the institution has changed its nature and wants to be a different kind of school than it wanted to be then. In the '70s, the model that I heard about, the one that we all talked about, was like Black Mountain. Black Mountain was a school that was in existence probably in the '50s in North Carolina: Joseph Albers, Annie Albers, John Cage, people like that and so many others taught there. It was a real workshop where the faculty were working on their own work all the time. And students came—again, open admissions—students came and worked as aides in the studios with faculty. There

was a real intimate relationship between doing, learning, and teaching. That required people of high motivation and usually some life experience. That is to say, they weren't eighteen-year-olds straight out of college. They were people who had been somewhere and were coming to college with a passion for something, passion for learning. And a passion, also, usually, to change their lives. So, we would occasionally have young people but typically our students were older than they are now. And they came in with a lot of drive. Now, the institution—for a million reasons, some of which I think are bad reasons and some of which I suspect are normal reasons—has chosen to be much more of a regular four-year college, recruiting out of high school. And an open admissions school that recruits out of high school is very frequently going to get not the strongest students. In the early '70s, and probably through the '80s or part of the '80s at least, we might have had students who'd test poorly—and yet we didn't have testing then, no one even asked about ACT or SAT—but people, you could tell, had alternative learning styles. And yet, because they have a passion and a deep motivation, this never held them back; or it would hold them back in some areas, but usually not the ones they were choosing to study in depth. Now, the institution has chosen to not make that significant. Part of our student body, in fact, as I understand it, there's been an initiative away from transfer students. One of the pleasures in teaching is often the transfer students: People come in and they're here because they now know what they want to do. And you're excited to have transfer students in

a class. And, as I understand it, the institution is doing very little to encourage transfer students, very little to—in fact, purposefully—is designing a school that's made for zero freshmen, which is a horrible term and I wish they would come up with something else. But in any case, entry level, not been to college before students. Well, they're not going to be able to produce that intense, highly motivated learning that was characteristic of the school in the '70s.

What do you think are the reasons that have caused that?

Is it funding, accreditation?

I don't think it's accreditation. I don't think it's accreditation because we gained our accreditation for just what we were then.

Was that, I'm sorry, was that right around when you came when they got accreditation?

I think I'd been here three or four years. I'm not sure, maybe it was '78, our first accreditation—something like that. So I was here during the first self-study and, interestingly enough, a social person friend of mine was hired, a guy named Coffey, by the College to do a study of our school prior to the self-study, you know, to sort of prepare ourselves with what we might look like. But in any case, it was so small you knew everybody; you knew the people who were testing you. I'm not sure why the administration's done that. I think a lot of it came about from Mike's vision—the vision of the kind of school he wanted it to be, and then even before he retired, I think he withdrew from the life of the College in major ways, as is perfectly normal. But I think his driving energies, as a young man, as a middle-aged man, that that

began to wane as he got older and he left the College more in the hands of other people. And, of course, I know accreditation is different now. All across the board we see that what is being asked of colleges is different from what was asked for in the days of relevancy education in the '70s. It proves to me that it might be possible to reconfigure the College more as a school designed for transfers, more as a school for later learners. And I'm not sure that that wouldn't be a good thing to do economically, but that's not the agenda now.

And that was one of the other questions that I was going to ask you, if you want to add anything to this, that you talked about the model of the Black Mountain and that concept, but how would you describe the mission of Columbia College and then what is its relation—if you see any—to the larger American society and perhaps its influence on the arts in America or the media in America; if you've seen a relationship since you've been here...

Well, in the early '70s there were so many missions. There was an atmosphere of high idealism. And everyone thought that things would change for the better and that Columbia was going to be in the forefront of that. Free Street Theater was close with Columbia in those days, which was exciting, guerilla theater. And we had a very strong mission to give access to educations, to communities and individuals who just hadn't had access to good education before. Part of this, of course, meant poor people; part of it meant minority people. And in those days, minority at Columbia was blacks and there was a real effort to reach out into the ghettos of Chicago—which, at that time, had recently been torched in the fires and the riots

after 1968—to really reach out and to give opportunities for learning about how to give voice to a community, how to give voice to individual experiences that no voice had been permitted prior to that time. That was very important. I remember in the courses that I taught that there were a lot of black students; a third was not unusual, maybe even fifty percent some of the time, both men and women. Now, it's very few black students in my classes and typically more women than men. Now if we have minorities in classes, they tend to be Asian, Asian-American, Hispanics, Latinas, Latinos, but black people in our department are really down. So Columbia saw itself as rooted in the city, rooted in the city of Chicago, rooted in its class origins, rooted in blue collar people and minority people and really trying to give them access to education, an excellent arts education—arts/communications education—that they typically had not had. That's where we all saw open admissions as exciting, is that you didn't have to prove yourself by the traditional measurements of ACTs and SATs and good grades in high school; you just had to come and have a mission. And it was tremendously exciting to be a part of that. Now, open admissions seems to be where sometimes kids who have not gotten it together in high school now come to college and it's like, "Oh, I suppose I should go to college." Often they're dragged here, more or less reluctantly, by parents and it's a very different kind of atmosphere. Which isn't to say we don't have highly motivated people; we do, but not in the numbers that we used to. We have much more typical eighteen-year-olds who are trying to work out separation from family issues and

that doesn't make for eager learners often. I mean, they're eager to get away from home, they're not quite so eager to be in college.

That's an interesting theme that has come up again and again, this really changing the definition of open admissions. Earlier it meant access and today the image is, you can't go anywhere else or...

Exactly right, exactly right, that's such a sad thing. I have a good personal friend whose son has a miserable high school record. He's actually not been in a class, a regular high school class, for two years. You know, they have this last ditch effort at his school to stop dropouts. I don't know if they even have a pretense of educating people who might be dropouts. I think it's based on funding because what this boy has to do is go to high school two hours a day between 4:15 and 6:15 and what reports do they do? Do they do library research? Do they do writing? Do they do anything? No, they sit here between 4:15 and 6:15 and chat about the issues of the day. He has a full-time job as a stock boy and he's also got a small police record for boosting Tommy Hilfigers from Nordstroms. Now guess what is happening? He's graduating in this ersatz program which he's been in now for three years. He's graduating in June and where does he think he's gonna go to college? Columbia. And it's just, "Oh dear, oh dear." Now this is a boy who should go and do something else for a while, he should not come to college. But, in any case, now he may be an extreme. He's a boy I actually love, I've known him since he was an infant, but he should not be coming to college. And he seems to stand for at least a portion of

what I see in my classes.

You've already mentioned a few people including students, faculty, but if you could maybe elaborate on some of the people that you remember best at Columbia and why. So if there's, you know, just a few that particularly stand out, but then describe why they were memorable or what impact or influence they had...

Don't let me start because I can go on for days on that. There have been wonderful, wonderful administrative people. Louis Silverstein was the dean and he really put a certain spin on that office which was wonderful. I understand why he wouldn't want to do it forever, but he was a fun dean and he really kept the school perking along and really was someone who generated a lot of ideas. I don't think he stood for curricular excellence, but that was OK, that came later. I have to say that one of the biggest characters of the school, in my experience, was Jim Newberry, who is no longer here. But he was the chair for the first few years and I think he had a lot to do with defining the [Photography] Department even as it is today. He was, I think, the one who began the Photography Department in its correct gestation and correct form.

Jim was a thin man, kind of eccentric, who always had lots of women around him. And that may have been one of the things that marked a lot of the people in the early days. There was this real sexy atmosphere to a lot of the guys in the Photography Department and Jim Newberry was one of those men, although he had like nine children at the time; I'm not exaggerating, I think it is nine. Jim Newberry was a book collector, a fine photographer of a kind of photography that's no longer in fashion, a sort of

symbolist kind of photographer, very symbolic photographs of nude women—what a surprise. His office was a narrow office made cavernous by rows and rows of books, floor to ceiling books, and when I say floor to ceiling, probably twelve-foot ceilings. You could barely get through it. It looked like a crazy person lived there, someone who didn't throw anything out, but it was all books. And Jim could lay his hand on a book just like that. And he brought in books, as students were doing work in various areas, he would bring in what was appropriate and he was just such an insightful and such a sensitive man. But he was, as I say, pack rat. And he had an immense ball of keys. You know how every guy in high school had these rings of keys? Well, Jim's rings of keys grew and grew and grew. And he would go through them one at a time to find his office door key. So Jim would stand in his office, waiting to open his office door, and go through this ring of keys. One time, when he wasn't there, and because it took a while to do it, he'd leave the keys in the door—we had no security—and this big ring of keys would be hanging from his door and the door would be open. Well, Barry Burlison, who was a faculty member at that time, always thought this was very funny so he started sticking on extra keys. Any time Barry came in, he would add four or five keys to Jim's bundle. And so pretty soon, the bundle of keys must have had several hundred keys and one at a time, Jim came in and was going through hundreds of keys, he didn't realize it, and he said, "I cannot figure out, I don't know where half these keys came from." After that, the office broke out because we'd been seeing Barry sticking extra

keys on for six months. No one ever told Jim, he was never able to get down to a reasonable set of keys. Jim was an absolute character and he is someone I will just never forget. He is, as I understand it now, a painter in New York City and has gone back to being the most traditional of portrait painters; trying to live a kind of garret life in New York City. He had been at the University of Texas before that as a photography teacher.

Barry Burlison, the guy who stuck all the keys on, was the guy who invented the pop-up greeting card. You know those cards that pop up? Well, Barry got the first business going for that, again in the mid '70s. They found a small village in the nation of Columbia where he had actually taken a field trip with students that had paper making skills and he invented the pop-up card. I think others have gone on to do more with it but Barry's was the first pop-up greeting card. So, Barry is someone I remember with great vividness. Charlie Traub, the chairman after Jim Newberry and the guy who hired me, did a lot to oversee the first enlargement of the department, you know, that first real burgeoning in the mid '70s, when the art market was booming and photo classes were booming. Charlie was a sweet-faced guy who you would think was such an innocent, with long sort of silkish, drawn-out strawberry blonde hair, and a Southern accent—he was from Louisville. And he wore, you know, khakis and white shirts way before khakis and white shirts were any kind of norm. He just seemed like a good old boy but he was a rascal when it came to art, very smart, very savvy. He left here and went to New York and was in an art gallery, and now he's head of the

photography department, School of the Visual Arts. So Charlie had a good career since then. And then after Charlie left, John Mulvany came to chair. And really, he regularized the department. You know, he's really been here for the past twenty years. He's the chair of both Art and Photo, and under John, the Art Department has just grown tremendously. I don't know how big it is. I think one quarter of the credit hours in the College might be attributed to the Art Department; it's huge. So the department has grown steadily, John has done a lot.

How has he been chair of both?

Well, how it happened, this is interesting. John came here and then he went to Illinois Wesleyan. He was here for just one year as chairman, it may have been right after Jim Newberry left, then John moved to Illinois Wesleyan and was the chair of the art department there. This is maybe when Charlie came in. Charlie was the chair for three or four years and then Charlie left. There were three faculty members: myself, Peter Thompson, and Lauren Capps, and we started thinking about, maybe what we should have is a different structure within the visual arts. The Art Department was starting to grow because there was tremendous pressure on that part of the curriculum and it was growing like crazy. The three of us started to put together an idea of a Dean of Visual Arts where Art, Film, and Photography would be under one dean and then each would have their own chair. And we had a series of meetings with Mike Alexandroff about this and Mike seemed to think this was a great idea. But when we interviewed John Mulvany for that post, when it came down to it... [that's not what we wanted] So, when the actual final negotiations for the job

came down, and of course the faculty members are not involved with that, Alexandroff offered John Mulvany the job of being the chair of Art and Photo and John accepted. At that time, Tony Loeb was chair of the Film Department; that continued and no Dean of Visual Arts came about. So, there was some sense that an opportunity to link the visual arts had not been taken and... We were to have John in the Photography Department—and I'm sure Art people felt the same way—still, it seemed like that was an opportunity to forge links in the visual arts that was denied, an opportunity that was missed. And furthermore, the kind of separation of the departments really just went into yet another round, which is continued today. Each of the departments really run very much as little feudal kingdoms. And even though John chairs two different departments, our two departments are still like little feudal kingdoms. We have almost nothing to do with the Art Department and they have nothing to do with us. Although we count many of each other as personal friends, the amount of cross-fertilization is just non-existent. There are one or two classes that are taught between the two departments, that are co-taught, and they have requirements in our department and we have required courses that are in their department.

OK, what have been some of the most important events or occurrences that have happened at Columbia during your tenure, things that, again, you remember the most—personally or professionally, I mean, in your time at Columbia?

Some of those would be impolitic to discuss. Mostly, it seems to me

the big choices, the big decisions that are made on the institution's behalf, the choices of chairs are very important, the choices of the President—very important, the choice of Provost—very important. These are all things that have changed in my time here. And each of them seems to say which direction the institution is going to go. And each of them has, I would say in the last two years, they've all been very conservative choices, going in the same direction.

And so looking back, again, since you came to Columbia, how have the students changed? How has your vision of education changed? Has Columbia influenced that?

Well, in the era that everyone's so nostalgic about, the classrooms were much more informal. I hate to say this but it was not unusual at a final critique to have beer and wine. It was absolutely typical, actually. And final critique for me would have not just you and your students but you'd invite everybody in from the department. There was a real sense of real community. And so I would visit other people's final critiques and chat and talk and... So there was much more of a sense of it being a department, sections were in the department but everyone was a part of the department. So I was just as interested in somebody else's class; typically I would know some of the students in that class, they would invite me. Then they'd come to my critique in my 2-D class; it was very fluid and very pleasurable. It was everyone participating in everyone else's critique and now it's arranged on a case by case basis. Among the things that I've come to learn, though, is that in some ways I think I'm a better teacher now than I was then because I'm much more aware of what different learning styles actu-

ally mean. I'm much more able to discover differences, you know, when I'm talking broadly about motivation and having poorly motivated students as a problem—I do see that as a problem—but I'm also more able now to accurately identify learning disabilities or alternative learning styles which can mask themselves sometimes as poor motivation. One of the things that has happened is I believe all of us are much more professional teachers than we used to be. And knowing more about teaching than we used to, we're now able to reach different kinds of students. I'm not dismayed by having a bunch of lackadaisical eighteen-year-olds in a class. I see that as another opportunity. I want them to learn to take responsibility for themselves, to break out of the kind of insularity that they seem to have as eighteen year olds, typically, and to also identify areas of passion and interest; help them identify how to break out of their reserve. So, I think I see my task differently than I used to. I used to believe my task was to educate people to really become good craftspeople, insightful about visual culture, insightful about the culture that they worked in and lived in and to be aware of how they were manipulated or affected by that culture, to become good communicators. I always felt that as part of a liberal education because I knew then, even when the atmosphere was looser, that not everybody in my classes was going to go on to become a photographer or in the visual arts. It was a college and if everyone became visual artists we'd be buried under them. I believe that most of them would go on to something else, as I did. I was an English major so I went on to something else. But, I was much more passionate about teaching them about visual culture and teaching them about self-

responsibility and teaching them about what they could do by the teaching of photography. And now I see myself as looking at a slightly earlier stage of education, much more about getting them to speak out, to analyze themselves. But I feel as if I used to work with twenty-five year olds and now I work with eighteen-year-olds. And there's something exciting about those eighteen year olds, but it's not what I was doing with the twenty-five year olds; it is a different kind of education.

I have to ask you, because what you describe when you came here is very different from today, and you seem to embrace the change. Was it hard and was it too hard for some people? Some people who were here not dealing with, I mean, standardization or mainstreaming of the College?

You know, I think that's true. One of the nice things about Columbia is that there's still a lot of eccentrics, but we have far fewer eccentrics than we used to. And in our department, in the Art Department, some of the most eccentric people are the ones who are unable to teach regular eighteen to twenty-one year olds. They were the ones who were almost like on a messianic coverage to lift their students up to the highest level of their art, whatever it would be, photography or painting or sculpting, what have you. Those people were always so impatient with students who couldn't get on that bandwagon. I think the teachers who've been most successful, who have been happy here and are still here, are the ones who have been able to see that the education mission has shifted and are willing to do that. So the eccentrics, so many of them are gone, much to

our regret. Some of those eccentrics, we miss.

How has Columbia influenced your work, understanding that earlier in the interview you said it's harder for you to find time for your work. Can you address that?

That has been the saddest part, I wish I had more time. I would love to be as free with my own work as I was but I can't imagine how. That just seems like a fairyland. That's been the biggest downside. The plus side is how much stimulation I get from my colleagues. Working with other artists and people in the English Department—after this I'm going to be speaking in an English class—I love the community of people who work here, it's a terrific place. At the faculty retreat I feel so lucky that I spend my life, my working life, with these people. There's so many good-hearted people and that's been stimulating, I've learned from other people here. I've learned from people like Sheila Baldwin, who's a terrific teacher at writing, I think. I've learned from my colleagues as if they were my teachers. Not that I don't learn from my students, I certainly do, my sense of the world is enlarged by my students. I mean, it's such a mystery. At one time, I used to think that if everyone had the benefit of the education I had everyone would pretty much feel the way I did about things. And the world is far more complex and I don't think we all share the same motives and goals, and I think I learned that through my colleagues and from my students. And that sense of awe at that complexity, that sense of awe, I get from my students and I have learned from them.

OK, where do you think Columbia's headed, what do you see on the horizon?

Hell in a handbasket (*laughs*). That's what everyone always says. You know, if I were the President of the United States I'd insist on mandatory, compulsory community service for two years. And it would help the United States and it would help Columbia College, in my view, if we had people who were a little older. And if I were able to do things, I would shift this to a school that put its emphasis on late learners and on transfer students. But I don't see that as a direction and my voice has not been—you know, this is not a democracy and I haven't voted. But if I were to vote I would vote for that. I think this emphasis on eighteen-year-olds, especially given open admissions and especially today, means that we have to shift this College tremendously to a school of deep remediation. And while I think it's a worthy thing to do, I don't think the school, as it's been formed, that was its original mission. I don't think most of the faculty are particularly good at that. I think we're able to do it, but I just think it takes resources that the College doesn't have as much of than we have other things like great artists in almost every department. I would like to see those talents used more, but I don't think that's the way it's going.

Well, let's finish the interview. I think if you could touch up a little bit of your background—you referred to that. What was your background before coming to Columbia?

I was a kid in college who could not decide on a major so I had three majors: English Lit, Filmmaking, and Art History. And it wasn't until my last quarter of

college that I had one elective. You know, for three majors you don't get any electives. I had one elective and I took a photojournalism course and that just altered my life tremendously. I fell in love. I mean, just really tumbling downhill into love for this medium. I loved the fact that it was a democratic medium, that you didn't have to train forever to learn it, that it was accessible, that people could understand it. It was a people's art and I loved that. So I worked for a while and got money for graduate school, did graduate school and worked as a picture editor. Then after I started teaching here for Columbia, other work that I did for money is what's called editorial photography, working for small corporations, doing photographic assignments or for interior designers doing interiors and so on. But as time went on, as my duties here expanded, I did less of that. I've been a fine art exhibiting photographer for several decades. As a teacher, well, as an artist, I also do a lot of literary writing now. I've published short stories, I've written a novel and I now blend what I do. I do visual art sometimes and I do literary writing sometimes and my most recent photo projects have all involved text with pictures. So...

Do you think Columbia, perhaps, has contributed to that? If you were at another institution do you think that you'd move, or was it your background where you had these three majors that...

Actually, I don't think it is Columbia, although if Columbia has stayed what it was in the '70s, I think that might have been true. But now, I really feel mostly who I see on a regular basis is the Photography Department [faculty]; it's not English [faculty], although

I have friends in English, but I've made them roundabout outside of Columbia. No, I don't think it's been part of Columbia's atmosphere of the last decade, to promote that kind of cross-disciplinary work that I now do myself. I think at one time it was Columbia, but it's not now. I think actually I'm a benefit in my own department for this because I use a lot more writing in my classes. And students say they'll love my involvement with text because they use text more in their projects in my classes. But I don't think the College has really supported that. It sort of happened parallel to Columbia.

OK, well, that sounds good. A reoccurring thing in the interviews has been an issue of size and I was wondering if you could address that.

Well, Columbia's changed because of its size tremendously, but I don't think size is the reason the institution has changed and does not foster the kind of intensity and cross-disciplinary energetic learning that was typical in the '70s. I don't think that faded because of our size. I think it's faded because there are too few full-time teachers to do it. So you might say it's size. We have too many students and too few full-time teachers. However, if we had more full-time teachers, perhaps tremendously more, maybe four times as many as we currently have, then the size would no longer be the factor and then we'd have sufficient full-timers to do the business of College work, but also keep ideas flowing about exciting new ways to teach what we teach. When everyone's scrambling to stay on the treadmill a lot of creativity is lost; it's just keep the engine going and I think that's what we have now. So I don't think our problem is our

size. We're not eight thousand, we may be pushing nine thousand. I think it's eight thousand with a full-time faculty of a hundred and sixty people. And if we had six hundred full-time people we'd still have a heavy reliance on part-timers, but I think you'd find the creative energy of this institution changing overnight.

That touches on another important issue, that ratio of not only full-time to student but full-time to part-time, I mean, you know, the camaraderie in the faculty. Could you project why the institution has been slow in addressing this problem that everyone seems to agree...

It's obviously economic. And it's not only at Columbia, although it's perhaps in one of its worst forms at Columbia, the expectations [placed on] part-time teachers. Columbia's statement about itself is that we teach what we do. Well, full-timers can do way less of that than we used to be able to because of the tremendous amount of responsibilities we have. And part-timers, we used to have more part-timers who taught just specialty courses, that is what they did. For example, medical photography or a journalism person, that's true. But our department and every other department in the school has teachers, part-time teachers, teaching the meat and potato classes, and I think that's a problem. I think that English Comp should not be mostly taught by part-timers. I think it should be mostly taught by full-timers and it's not. So we are using part-time teachers because of their broad skills and they have them, but we're making them do regular college work. With issues about advising and other problems—they're not free to advise, they don't have the time to do it, they're stretched and they

can't have institutional loyalty because a part-timer has to teach at three different colleges to make a living. How could they be loyal to Columbia if they're teaching at Harper as well? It's very difficult. I would say that the part-timers that we have in this department, we are so lucky to have them. They are wonderful people and they are tremendously terrific colleagues. But I wish that we didn't need so many part-timers to do the regular classes. I wish, indeed, that they just came on and taught specialty classes, that full-timers were able to do more of what we do, that we were able to keep our professional lives lively so that as we teach then we teach those classes. But when we have such a reliance on part-timers it's the worst of both worlds for everybody concerned. I look at what the School of the Art Institute has done recently with their part-timers and it's a much better system. They too rely to much on part-timers but the dean of that college, Carol Becker, was saying recently that they've felt a push to do what they've done, which was an increase in salary as time goes on, benefits, different stays, sabbaticals, leave time for part-timers, tiered levels for longer service; all of these are benefits. And she said, "We had to do it, we rely so much on part-timers and it's the humane thing to do." And I think Columbia was, unfortunately, dragged kicking and screaming to the table, and it's unfortunate; but I hope that any bad feelings withered, because our part-timers are such a vital and contributing part of this College. I just wish we didn't need so many.

So you're saying that in the Photography Department, your part-timers are not full-time photographers teaching a

specialty. Are they also trying to teach at several other schools?

Oh yes. As I say, medical photography is taught by a woman who does medical photography and photojournalism is always an evening class because the fellows who teach that work at the Tribune and The Sun-Times. But most of our classes are taught by artists, photographers, who just like the full-timers are finding themselves squeezed to get their work done. They're teaching probably as many hours as we are only at different schools. So that typically, our teachers—for example, Deb Levy, who teaches a couple of beginning classes, but she teaches at Harper and College of DuPage. So, she is doing what she does and one of the things that she does is she's a professional teacher.

I think that's interesting because one of the popular images is that that issue is more associated with say, like, the Liberal Education department, that the departments that Columbia is most known for—Film, Photography—they do have these people who are full-time working in the field and they come here and moonlight or give something back, but are not teaching as their main occupation.

Well, my guess is that if anyone actually were to interview those people and find out how they're making their living, they're doing it the same way full-timers are doing it. They're mostly teaching and they're putting their creative hours into smaller and smaller parts of their day. And I think it's true of Film, I know it's true of Art, and I know it's true of Photography. So that someone who's teaching 2-D Design or even Advanced Painting

is also teaching at other schools and trying to paint or do their graphic design or what have you. But no, it's not just Liberal Ed and English, it's the creative fields too. I mean, creative major concentration fields, excuse me.

Do you think that the Art Institute could be a model for Columbia?

Yes, but I'm not sure quite how good. I know the dean of the Art Institute was willing to say it's wonderful but I'd like to look at it. But I do think that that serves as a template: seniority, benefits, increasing salary, and occasional relief time but still salary. Yes, I think so; I think, in other words, they should have full-time. If it's not possible to just enlarge the full-timers immediately, we should have something that might be similar to adjunct. And then part-timers would be restricted to one course in a specialty area: a marketing consultant who does Marketing; in Journalism, someone who's a sports writer or specializes in alternative audiences, what have you. Specialties in specialty areas. I think that we are really caught between a rock and a hard place in terms of educational needs and economic needs but that's where the creativity of the administration has to come in. We're letting education suffer until it is solved

Interesting. You've got a lot of good ideas. I hope someone gets to listen to them.

God, don't count on it *(laughs)*.