

Catherine Slade

...Interviewing Catherine Slade, on the 20th, is that right, of November?

I think so.

1998, Saturday. And thank you for calling. I wonder if we could start at the beginning, with when you came to Columbia and what brought you there.

Well, um, let's see... I came to Columbia, I think, in about 1968, and I graduated in '71, and I was just sort of, um, out there. I had been in school in the South, a music major, and it was a, you know, really traditional conservatory program, where there was no room for, you know, personal revelation or any, um, sense of myself in relation to what I was learning, myself in relationship when I was learning. It was more, you know, I was dealing with the paradigm of someone who knows, and I don't know. And that's what learning was like, you know, so it was sort of a continuation of that sort of life of primary school.

Yeah.

And I just was unable to find myself in that situation, and I knew that I needed to finish college, and I knew that music, as it was, was not enough for me, just, you know, to get a degree in music education and play the piano and the organ, you know. I mean, it just wasn't—

You were an organist and pianist?

You know, I was looking for a different way, a different way of being in the world, and a sense of meaning and purpose in performance. I mean, as it was, my experience with learning before was, like, good enough or not good enough. You know?

Mm-hmm.

I mean, there was—I wasn't asked to think (*laughs*), you know, I was asked to perform. And so, you know, I was searching, I was really searching, and it was that kind of time where everybody in America was, like, looking to discover life on personal terms, you know. They were no longer fitting in modes and whatnot, it was the late '60s, the early '70s, you know, everyone had a purpose, was committed to a social ideal. Before I came to Columbia I had been in North Carolina working for the textile unions, to union organize.

Oh, my.

And SNCC was going on, you know, all through the South. The women's movement was on the rise, you know, the antiwar movement was on the rise—and all these things were happening in the culture, that, you know, I mean, so there was a lot to listen to, and being in America, you know, an African-American, it's a call to consciousness and a call to attend on, you know, where you were in the bigger picture.

Mm-hmm.

So, there you are. And I was told about Mike Alexandroff.

Ah. I'm curious, who told you?

You know, I don't know, I mean, I don't really remember how all that came about. Oh, I do remember. I had a friend whose name was Frank [Cornecker], and he was a structural engineer who has since passed. He was Hungarian, I believe. I believe Frank did the structural engineering for Marina City. He was a genius, and I was working part-time in a little office during my theoretical Marxist period

(*laughs*), you know, reading all the big heavy books, and I was lost, you know, I was lost. I was 21, 20, something like that, yeah, and he just sort of knew where I belonged. He said, "You know, you should look into acting, my dear," because I had done writing, I had done some work with the public—Chicago Defender, I was—

So wait, were you a Chicagoan to begin with?

Yeah.

OK. So you said you were a music major down South.

I had a scholarship to Tennessee.

I see.

I don't really want to mention the school, I don't want to bad rap their program, you know.

But you had a Chicago connection from the start?

Yeah, I grew up here.

OK, OK.

So—and you know, I mean,



Tennessee State is renowned for its music, but it's more like, you know, great people have come from Tennessee State. It's just that that was my experience there as a piano player, music major, you know, was going the classical route. But it wasn't right for me.

Did you have sense of companionship in these feelings there?
Huh?

Did other people feel the same way?
Where?

In Tennessee.

Uh, well, actually, you know, the school was a—it was a great school, but, you know, you have to realize that it's a pretty—the music world was a male kingdom, and as a woman, fitting in, it's kinda funny. I wasn't on the jazz route, so there was this sort of really hip thing happening with jazz at the school. The band was all men, 100 players, so I got to be a majorette, but I couldn't play.

Uh-huh.

You know, so there was a lot of restrictions that were there for a woman. I mean, it was a great place to be for having fun and partying and all that kind of stuff, but I've never been that kind of person. I've never been interested in... you know, hanging out and just sort of partying and not taking my life seriously, even then. I was really, really searching.

Huh. So your friend urged you to take up acting?

Well, he said, "You are an actress, my dear," and really, he was right, because I loved literature, I always have, and writing was something that I wished to do. I'm writing these days, but at that time, I just

didn't have the self-discipline to sit alone in a room with the typewriter. So I had written some poetry, and some short stories and things like that, so there was that love. There was the music on the other end, so the theater was the perfect place to combine all of my talents and interests. And it was a place that allowed me to be expressive, you know, to be imaginative. It wasn't a matter of—like what I had said, was my training in music was a matter of learning, of coming not knowing to learn technique, you know, technique, you have to get your technique, you know.

Right, right.

So, anyway, I hope that's enough stuff around that.

Yeah. So you were told about Mike Alexandroff, and then what?

Well, um, I mean it was just—yeah, I came over to Columbia, and I remember having a conversation and just really being sort of awestruck by—as a listener, you know, as a student, you know, I became a listener, rather than a student, if you can understand that. I mean, it was a [felt] shift, you know, that it was more about something being revealed to me, and my life learning was taking on this new character rather than something I had to perform on a test, you know, a concert, it was just a shift in knowing what school was about and for, you know? It was like taking on a new truth. And it was also understanding that coming to Columbia, you know, it was like one goes on their own human journey, and that includes the possibility of failure, because I was asked then to, you know, get involved with my own ideas, which, of course, I, you know, I didn't know what I wanted. But I was asked a question, to think about my own mission, and why an artist, and

how important it was for me to have a clear picture of who I was, and who I—well, who do you think you are? (*Laughs*) Just, you know, I mean, I got hauled into a realm of reverence for learning, you know, that was—it changed my life completely.

Hmm. Can you—

I mean, then there was direction, you know, then there was... a way of determining what I was going to do next, you know? I mean, either, you know, as a theater person, you know, I could get to be an interpreter of someone else's work, or I could get to choose, you know, I could get to choose what I wanted to do, what I wanted to say, why I was doing the work. You know, I was asked to participate in my choices, and that was the extraordinary role that Mike played, Jim O'Reilly, the great Jim O'Reilly—did you know Jim?

No. Tell me about Jim O'Reilly.

Well, Jim was the chairman of Theater, and there was another—Don Sanders was there for a time, but Jim O'Reilly was the chairman of Theater when I was at Columbia, and he was one of Chicago's greatest treasures, as a communicator and artist, thespian, educator, leader... He was an extraordinarily creative man who stressed the role of creativity and imagination in learning, you know? I mean, it wasn't about just learning the lines to a play, you know, I mean, thinking was critical, learning was critical, and—because as an actor, you can end up being a puppeteer, you know, going through some dramatic experience that's defined by a director. So his only direction was, like, one's role was defined, you know, in terms of an artist, a creator in the world. It was extraor-

dinary. I mean, to feel—you know, radiating... to have a sense of self-radiating in that way, through the expressive arts, the expressive arts, I mean, just, you know, the nomenclature changed. Everything changed. I mean, that's what—I mean, Columbia, like, was this incredible revelation in terms of my own personal growth, in terms of understanding what learning and education was about, what relationships to teachers, you know, and that, in turn, relating to subject matter with subjectivity in relation to what I was learning, appropriating that, you know, how is this meaningful in my life, I mean, just—it was a holistic experience that just—

Well, what do you—I'm curious now, do you—

I know I'm not being clear, but that's hard for me, I mean, I'm just sort of...

No, no, no, this makes perfect sense, but I'm wondering, can you point to the teachers, point to something about the structure, point to the students, point to just the atmosphere? Is there any one of these that, sort of, is especially... gets the credit for creating this experience, really?

Well, Bill Russo was there, and Bill had his wonderful music groups that were doing the Civil War and Aesop's Fables and... I worked with Bill, you know, just—it's hard for me now, 'cause it's so long ago, to remember teachers specifically. There was... oh my God, the woman from the Goodman, I just can't recall her name right now. You know what you ought to let me do? You ought to give me your questions. I can continue this with you, if you don't mind.

Well, um—

And I can just ask—'cause I've just forgotten, and I really would like to, you know, be as thorough as I can.

Well, maybe I could—I wonder if I could sort of proceed with some other things, and maybe we could come back to this, in that fashion, a little bit later. Would that be possible?

Yeah.

I was gonna ask you if you remembered, sort of, what classes, any of the classes you were signed up for. Were they all in theater?

Yeah, but see, you're asking me questions now that are hard for me...

Yeah, yeah... did you take courses in—

I had theater classes, I had music classes. I had creative writing classes.

Anything like television?

No, I don't think so.

Dance?

I don't think I... I think I had... I think Schultz was there. Wasn't John there at that time?

Uh, I think right around then.

Yeah, yeah, I think so. I think so. I'm not good on these dates, precisely, either.

Right. I remember I did the creative writing, and it was really fun.

Hmm. Tell me about some of the other students, when you were a student.

Oh, well, the students, I mean, that was, you know, I mean, it was—Columbia was, like, the hub of the city, I mean, everybody was there. Everybody there was, like, really

involved in everything, you know, people were, like, doing shows in the city, running—you know, Paul Sills, Grimm's Fairy Tales, Victoria Gardens was on the—I mean, you know, it was just, like, Grand Central Station in terms of—I mean, everybody who taught there was a working professional, so, you know, you were involved in their lives and off to see their work in the evening. It was just—I mean, all of the sudden, it was like a little New York City. It was just great. It was just great, you know, this wonderful building, the old [Crafts] Building down there on—I think—was that at 540?

540 Lake Shore.

Yeah. It was... it was just really wonderful being there, I mean, people knew your name, it was, you know, people would call me by name and I had no idea who they were, you know. So there was this sense of care and recognition and validation that was just in the environment, you know, the environment was exciting, you know, we were empowered, we were asked to do our own work and become—you know, messengers and teachers ourselves. I remember when I was in school there, I went off and started a theater workshop on the West Side—I mean, I went and started it. I mean, it gave me such belief in myself that to think—I think, therefore, I am, I can do, you know, what are my intentions here? I can enter the world with purpose, you know. I started a workshop at the County Jail—

Wow!

That was volunteer, that ended up statewide, I mean, all of these things were a part of, like, this sense of power and commitment that was, you know, just—sort of—

I mean, it was the mission message of the school, you know. If you want to do, you can do.

Tell me about this—at the jail. This sounds interesting, especially interesting and a bit unusual.
Mm-hmm.

What was it like? How did you do it?
Well, I just went over and saw the warden, and I said—you know, “I want to start a theater workshop.”

Did you have a connection?
And I remember, I was doing... I had—you know, you had to have projects when you were there, so as a project, I decided I was gonna go over to the County Jail and start a theater workshop and I—

Did you dream this up?
Yeah.

Wow.
I dreamed it up because, you know, I mean, I’m working with Bill Russo, he’s doing the Civil Wars, you know, everybody had a real sense of what was going on—politics, you know, I mean, it was not about “Let’s be entertainers and make some money.” It was just like “Why do you want to be an artist,” you know? What—

And they let you do this at the jail?
Huh?

They let you do this at the jail?
They let me do it, you know, they let me do it, it was, like—it was to awaken possibilities in the, you know, like, population, the inmate population that was there, you know, to tap into their... expressive needs and allow them a sense of creativity and self-esteem, you

know, to like, sort of, create some sort of tension between possibilities other than where they are right now, you know, what they might do in the world if they were not in this jail experience. It was about using the jail experience for learning, and...

So did you walk in there with a, you know, 10 copies of this script of Hamlet and have them do this, or what did you do? Did you have them write something?
No, we evolved all our text. I mean, like I said, from doing stuff like the Story Workshop, I mean, you knew you could go in and make it fit. You just knew you could do it, and, you know, like youth is, you just don’t even think about not doing what you want to do, you’re just determined and out there. So we evolved our texts. No, all of our texts were texts that came out of their own personal journeys and stories and don’t forget, at that time, just like right now, there was this very strong underground—it wasn’t underground, it was a movement of the poets, and... sort of the bards of the last poets, you know, making albums, and that was really hot stuff. There were poetry readings everywhere, so everybody wanted to do these things. It was like, you just could ask the question, make the call, to do something different, you know, to see different possibilities in existence. And I got that from what had just happened to me. I mean, it’s years later, I can look back and give some definition to it, I mean, I certainly wasn’t thinking like that at the time, I was, like, doing my work.

Now, did you do this with any other Columbia people?
Um... no. I mean, I didn’t have any other Columbia people on the job with me, no.

So how long did this go on, at the jail? Was it, like, a semester’s project, or a year?

It eventually ended up a statewide funding program, with The Free Street Theaters of Chicago. You know, I asked Patrick Henry, who was a director, if, you know, I could join with their organization, and then, you know, he raised the money. David Mamet worked with me. David had just come back to Chicago, I needed a playwright, so I recruited David, and we went off together.

To the jail?
Yeah. Pontiac, downstate, Dwight, county jail, Statesville, there was—where was it... over there on the West Side, the Audie Home. You know, we got around.

Now, you said you didn’t just come to just be entertainers or anything, and that you had a strong sense of what you were doing. Did you have a sense that you were gonna get some kind of a job at the end of your time as a student at Columbia? Or what?
Well, actually, um... because I had been in college and out of college, and back in, I was always working. I always had both lives. I mean, I was mature, I wasn’t a kid at home with my parents taking care of me. I had my own apartment and whatnot. And then after I had done the [volunteer] program and I asked Patrick Henry, he fundraised—see, there was plenty of money around, he got money, so I had a salary. A nice one. It wasn’t great, but at the time, I mean, how much do you need if you’re in college, really? I mean, really, in college, you know, being—getting by is part of it.

Now, is that typical of the other students at that time?
Well, yeah, everybody was doing

stuff. I mean, the other theater students who were involved with Paul Sills and that company eventually, you know, ended up in New York with the Grimm's Fairy Tales. I mean, that was the thing, that students were involved in the artistic life of the city. And so there you were learning, I mean, you could walk out and see, you know, like your teachers or your mentors, you know, you could come to the University of Chicago and there was Jim, playing Lear, you know, as a star in the city. So there was this great sense of community, of the greater Chicago community, not that kind of isolated sense of another world that you have when you're in a university, you know what I mean, where you're sort of living in never-never land. No, we were extended. And Columbia has that strength today, where its faculty is a part of the local and national picture, you know, that they are involved, and they can offer opportunities to students and—you know, I get calls all the time from students for their other projects that are happening outside of the school. These are kids, I just had a call this morning—somebody's getting ready to get her book published, and she wants to take a voice class with me next semester because she's planning on making a CD and—do you see what I'm saying? So there's that kind of entrepreneurial spirit that certainly was there in the old days, because, I mean, everybody was an entrepreneur, it was that sort of maverick spirit that created the school.

And the boundaries between school and life are not very strong, if they're at all.

No. There's a sense of our family and our community. Which is much more like a family. You know

what I mean? It's like, there's your nucleus family that functions within the community, and so that's more of an appropriate paradigm, rather than the hallowed walls that, you know, that you are in, isolation, cloistered in, where you do your learning, and then you have to do a re-entry. *(Laughs)* So, you know, that is a significant difference, I think, and extraordinary quality of Columbia's role in education, higher education in the city, you know, in terms of students being prepared, I mean, that preparedness is a part of the learning process.

Yeah. Yeah.

And preparedness and participation, you know, I mean, one can attempt things and fail, you know. And you have—you can go through that—it's a part of your learning, and hence of your dignity, you know, which means you may goof up here, you may not get it right. You can try this thing, and it may not work. I mean, I have two wonderful students right now, I have a wonderful class I just started on—

OK, excuse me just a second.

Thank you.

Oh, Chris, I'm gonna have to go, too.

OK. Listen, can we do a little more at some later point?

We can.

Today is December 10th, and this is the second half of an interview with Catherine Slade. Um, the other day, we got up to your graduation, and I don't think—I don't know if you mentioned the graduation. I wonder if you could just talk about that for a minute. The graduation?

Yeah.

What do you want to know about it?

What was it like? You graduated in '71, and—who was there, and what happened? Who spoke?

Well, um, I graduated magna cum laude from Theater, I gave a speech during graduation. I had just had a child, so I had my baby with me onstage. *(Laughs)* [I came up] with all kinds of goofy stuff, you know, refused to wear robes and stuff like that. It was the '70s, right? Early '70s. So, I mean, to my recollection, it was a wonderful time. You know, Bill Russo was playing the music, and... I can't remember who was the guest. I just can't remember, it was too long ago. But it was, you know, it was a really fun evening, I mean, Columbia's graduations have always been a bit extraordinary in terms of the mood of the students, and the fact that they're all artists means that there's a lot of individual ideas and perceptions on how the graduation should go that they bring to the room. But, yeah, that's...

Do you remember who else graduated with you?

No.

And did Mike Alexandroff speak? Yes, he did.

Was this one of his famous speeches?

Well, I mean, Mike has always been a very inspiring speaker, and he... oh, gee, I mean, it's—I wish you had talked—if I had known you wanted to talk about this, I could have thought about it for a while, or...

Oh, sorry, sorry. Well, tell me what you—

He's a wonderful storyteller, you know, and very inspiring, you

know, there's this—he's a passionate advocate of... entrepreneurship, you know. He inspired us to go out there and do our own thing, that personally and professionally, the world was limitless for us, you know. He taught us—and because, you know, Mike always had a political point of view, you know, to cross boundaries and to be compassionate, a compassionate observer of life... to care about people, the environment, each other, learning, fellow students, you know...

Tell me about the fellow students who were there. Do you remember how many people graduated?

I don't. I really don't remember that. I mean, of course, it wasn't huge, like now. But I can't—it's so long ago, and I think I would have a better memory, except I had just had my son, like, within four weeks before. So, you know, it was hazy for that reason. I mean, even to come back and try and finish under those conditions, you can understand...

Yes, indeed.

So the most significant event was the birth of my son, and, you know, so I had him with me, I was pretty proud of him (*laughs*).

What did you do—you were, sort of, out in the world for another, what, a dozen years or so, and then you came back as a faculty person. What did you do during those years?

Well, I was out longer than that. I, um, I went to New York and—well, first I started the prison drama programs through the state of Illinois, they started out as a volunteer program over at the county jail, and then we got funding and they went all over the state, so I put that program

together. I did sort of activist theater and created theater in the city for the marginalized. I created a senior citizens storytelling workshop that, you know, toured around the country. They were under the umbrella of the Free Street Theater of Chicago, but those were my programs: the prison drama program and the senior citizens workshop. David Mamet came to town, left New York, came to town, he was the playwright that worked with me. We would drive down to Pontiac and he would teach playwrighting, I was teaching acting, you know, and we would pull together shows. I'm sure that that influenced American Buffalo in some way.

Hmm, interesting. Do you have any of the materials? Tapes, videos, scripts, or anything like that?

From back then? No, you know, I lost almost all of my records, 'cause I had a fire at my house. Our place just—I mean, the whole place was up in smoke, so there was, you know, very—all that kind of stuff, like the paper stuff, was either waterlogged or destroyed. It was a really bad fire, and my apartment was on the 3rd floor, so—my bed was in the basement. I mean, it was a really bad fire, so, you know, every now and then—actually, I think we were able to salvage hardly anything. Hardly anything, though some wasn't destroyed. But it was, like, the brass bed, and it was, like, crashed into the first floor, and eventually, it ended up in some second hand store. Actually, that's where we saw it, and we knew it was our bed, and that's what we were told. "Oh, well, this is from a fire."

This is before you went to New York?
Yeah.

And when did you go to New York?

I went to New York... actually, um, I went to New York in... '73, maybe.

And what did you do there?

Um, I was—I was invited to New York by [Kristen] Linklater to be a part of the Working Theater, which was a group she was training voice and movement specialists to teach in theater departments, because that was her mission, and she thought that there was just not quality voice and movement work being taught, that all the emphasis was on acting, and not the body and the voice. So she got this huge grant, and we came there and trained eight hours a day, voice and movement, for three years. To be teachers, a teacher training. So, I mean, it was as intense as any Master's program—actually, we're all designated Linklater specialists, which was, you know, a certification as best as they could give at that time. But certainly it was Master's training.

So—and then in '76, you came back?

Where? To Chicago?

Yeah. Or, what did you do after three years of that?

I stayed in New York for 16 years.

For 16 years, oh my!

I was in New York a long time. I had my own company up there, I performed all over New York, you know, Off Broadway, and Broadway and... then I had a job with the American Repertory Theater at Harvard. And in the '80s I was back and forth to Harvard. Um, I taught at New York University, the graduate school of theater. I was master teacher of voice and movement at Hunter College for three

years. I mean, for 10 years, not three, 10 years, 10 years I was teaching at Hunter College.

So what brought you, finally, back to Columbia? How did that happen?

Um, my husband died, he had a heart attack and died, and I just wanted—after that had happened, you know, I had to review my life and being in New York, my son was just starting high school, and I just wanted to come home. And everything I had gone to New York to do, I had done. I had gone there to act in New York, I had been acting in New York for 15 years. I had gone there to create a theater company, I did it, I had a company called the Manhattan Bridge Company, which was Off Broadway in two years, you know, which is just wonderful. And my son was gonna go to high school, we didn't have any family up there or anything, so afterwards, you know, it was just like "Wait a minute, I wanna smell the roses here." We never know how much time we have, and New York was, as you know, incredibly hectic and fast-paced and career-conscious.
(Laughs)

Yeah. Huh. So you came back to Columbia? Or did you come back to Columbia right away?
I came back to Columbia. Yeah.

And—now, that was after 16, 17, 18 years?
I guess, I mean, '73, I came back to Columbia, it was '88, I think.

I'm curious about your sense, when you came back, of the difference in the institution.
Well, it had grown so much, I mean, it was amazing, it was in one building, a couple of floors, I think, before, at 540 Lake Shore Drive.

And now, Columbia was all over the South Loop. It was just incredible, the growth that had taken place in the institution. And um... the departments that had sprang up, I mean, they now had—you know, I mean, they had a graduate school, they had—oh my goodness. What's today's date?

The 10th.

Oh, OK. I'm OK. I was just thinking, I was supposed to be on someone's tenure committee. Wait a minute, hold on, hold on.

Sure.

The tremendous growth and, you know, the multiplication of departments, and the faculty had just grown so much, it was just wonderful to come back and, now, work alongside people that had been my mentors, like Bill Russo was there, and—who else was around who had been around all that time? Al Parker had been around for ever and ever, and Ed Morris had been around a long time. I'm not sure Ed was there then, though.

Hmm. Now, was this, essentially, more of the same atmosphere and the same approach and so on as when you had been a student?
Well—

Had things changed then, or have they changed since?

Well, Columbia has always had a multi-cultural educational paradigm that was integral to their curriculum and all levels of learning in the school. We always learned to—I mean, it was an idealistic kind of rapport that we would create with our students to encourage and teach them where they were, and bring them along. You know, we always appealed to first generation college students, students who, often, you know, were maybe second generation

Americans, or first. I mean, many of my students came from Eastern European backgrounds and were, you know, the students were the English-speaking Americans. So those kind of home-grown problems that face communities that, you know, deal with different kinds of prejudicial attitudes and differences, that suffer from injustices that are in this country, certain cruelties, I mean, Columbia had a real, honest embrace of—you know, the people that are marginalized. And certainly, that meant everything to me. And I believe that the school still, you know, I mean, look how they're growing, the Hispanic group now, and the kinds of programs that are evolving to support the students, the Asian students—I mean, you know, so it's still there, it's... unlike other places, there's this cultural and historical interest that is incorporated into the learning experience. I mean, I daresay that you're not gonna find that at Julliard, or, you know, other schools where the—you know, their art schools, but, I mean, I teach at the Art Institute, and certainly, I have students who come in that have an interest in political and cultural affairs and considerations, but, you know, many of my students, say, are more interested in art and that kind of observation that comes from aesthetic, you know, aesthetic paradigms rather than political/cultural ones, you know, there's a different focus that—I'm not judging it, I'm just, you know, making that distinction.

So that's—

So we stayed pretty true to mission and, you know, those early traditions that were set up in the teaching environment. It's not easy, our students, sometimes, but it's always challenging, and always fulfilling

to find the way to bring everybody around the corner together, you know? It's great. It's really great. And it makes me happy to be a part of Columbia, the institution, where we're not about denigration and dismissal of students because they're not up to snuff. We're looking at the bigger picture, I mean, really, the mission of educators to empower our students and study, ourselves, cultural diversity. You know, that's my opinion, you know. And facilitate that growth along with our subject matters, whatever that happens to be.

Yeah, I'm curious about the subject matters now. How would you say that the mission of Columbia with respect—how would you describe the mission of Columbia with respect to arts and communications media? The arts especially, which you're involved in.

Um, you mean theater?

Yeah.

Umm... well, I think what we've known all along is that—oh, that's a hard question to answer, 'cause I'm kinda tired right now. But, you know, I would say that, you know, say, the way we approach learning is holistic, using whole language skills, that, you know, that the strategies that are developed in the school—say, for learning and reading, you know, one learns storytelling, you know, the great work of John Schultz there. And how that work now is used to teach language skills and create workbooks and text sheets for the Chicago Public City school kids, through students of his Story Workshops. So, you know, I see that whatever—you know, so if you're dealing with language skills, or mathematical and science skills, I mean, look at the work that goes

on in our science department, or with Zafra, where, you know, the creative projects that involved all the other intelligences as well, like one is learning science through movement, or toymaking, or, you know, some spatial kind of design... futuristic projects and, um—do you know what I mean?

Mm-hmm.

So there's this artistic self-expressive approach to learning that's everywhere.

And it's had an impact on education, sort of beyond the walls of Columbia, it sounds like. Is that right?

Yeah, because—you deal with human intelligence. You know, you're dealing with the treasure chest of people's special gifts, and when you find these gifts where they can be self-expressive, that's where their intelligence is and that's the way of making connections to the world of core disciplines, as well as, you know, someone coming there because they're actually interested in filmmaking, or writing poetry, you know. That we help them go on this treasure hunt, you know, across the board in the school. Across the board, there's this... creative approach to learning, to—creative and experiential approach, experiential, because we deal with learning through experience, as opposed to, you know, the kind of deductive rationale that's used in, you know, writing tons of papers and reading libraries and all of that, you know, that we help students teach each other, you know, there's, like, this—everybody becomes a smart person, you know. The smart people approach. I have a student right now who has certain literacy problems, so other students and he are, you know, they're working, making tapes and CDs, and all that is helping this

friend learn. And everybody is enjoying the work without putting some sort of spotlight on him that he needs to run away and hide down the hall until he learns the alphabet. Do you see what I mean?

Yeah.

I've always liked that about Columbia. And, if anything, I worry what some of the new requirements that say if you're not on a certain level, you know, then you're removed and sent away to get yourself in shape, you know. I mean, I wonder what the effects of that might be. And I don't know, because it's early on, it's too early to tell. I mean, I know that there's lots of stuff out there now, in terms of requirements and assessing this, that, and the other, but, you know, I wonder what the outcome of all that will be. And that's coming from the outside.

Yeah, I was gonna ask: where do you think Columbia's headed?

Um... well, certainly, we're in a period of transition just now. I mean, for many reasons, we're setting up an infrastructure to handle the large student body that's there, which we have to do, you know. We're busy taking a look at ourselves, and you know, and evaluating what we offer and we have an eye out to make corrections and combine, you know, to get rid of, you know, duplication of classes. I mean, there's a tidying up that's being done, and we're entering the technological scheme of the world that's moving into the 21st century. We're doing what needs to be done to prepare ourselves and our students to, you know, come out of there and compete. Um, I think that that has changed our approach, or added on to the approach, you know, a necessary kind of structural awakening, because we have to fit

into this, sort of, global organizational model that's out there these days, you know? And we have to synthesize all of our, sort of, innovative... energies into something that's more structural, you know. I feel like this in terms of the growth of the school. You know, it was one thing, when I was there, there was, like, all these wonderful, maverick geniuses running the departments, and, you know, everybody was down the hall. Now, you know, we've got buildings everywhere. You know, we just—we've changed, and it was necessary. And it's necessary, this emphasis on integrating the curriculum, a sort of across the curriculum... whatever that is, I mean, don't quote me here, please, 'cause I'm not really up to snuff on all of that.

Mm-hmm.

You know, I don't have an administrative mindset at all. I think that that's good, as long as we continue to understand that people come to Columbia to be artists, practical artists, that's why they come there. They don't come to Columbia to be historians, or mathematicians or—you know, they come to Columbia for art. And as the internal struggles evolve, I mean, that's... the nucleus. As far as I know, that is the nucleus and motivating force of the institution, is its creative approach to the arts and learning and teaching. I mean, for those areas, like, in the liberal arts and whatnot.

I'm almost out of tape here, but I wanted to ask—
I'm getting tired

(Laughs)

I'm feeling like I'm incoherent, I'm not really—

No, you're doing fine. You're speaking a little slower than you might, but you're doing fine. Let me just ask you if your personal vision of education has changed over the years.

If my personal vision of education has changed?

Yeah.

Yeah, yeah, it has. I mean, I... when I started out, and especially since I've specialized in voice and movement work, you know, I had a lot of information to carry to my students, and I have—the subject matter was paramount, you know, when I started teaching. And as I grew as a teacher, there were other possibilities I allowed in the classroom, you know, awakening thought, students having the possibility to have time to reflect on other areas, where what they were learning from me, you know, could fit into other areas I would allow. I mean, other than moving towards theater, I mean, often my classes, because I would have a large number of filmmakers in there, we would have our focus on text, different types of text, and self-knowledge and subjectivity, because, I mean, that's the work of the writer. So I'd begin to, sort of, awaken this creative tension, and really like it in my classroom. I like arousing, sort of, ethical, political issues in the class. I mean, that's certainly a part of my training at Columbia... but allowing that type of thinking, content, to be a part of classroom and the whole learning curve for the semester.