2016

Interview with Nan Shineflug, 1998

Columbia College Chicago

Nana Shineflug

It is June 4th, 1998, and this is an interview with Nana Shineflug of the Interdisciplinary Arts Department.

So the program here is *[how old]*?

Well, the Interdisciplinary Arts program, which was originally started under a group called the Consortium of Universities, which was DePaul and Loyola and-what other schools where in that? There were like four universities and they were work programs that no one university wanted to sponsor at a graduate level but people wanted to do, so they banned together and they would teach these single courses. And you would shift around from one school to the other. Our students would get a degree from Loyola but, you know, we'd be teaching at a complete different facility. There were just programs like that. So at Columbia, when they started a grad program, we were perfect for this school because we were interdisciplinary arts, graduate, hands-on, and taught by faculty doing the things that they were teaching. Obviously we had been a stepchild, the people that were in the Consortium they would, you know, close the building and turn all the lights out and you'd still be there because they'd forget about you, you know. So it was really nice for us to be with people where we were part of the whole thing. We were definitely a reflection of the whole entire College. And so they brought us because we were already accredited and legitimate, and had a student body and had a reputation and had all the things, so it was just perfect for us. So Columbia just brought our program, brought it in.

So this is a program that was independent but also, in a sense, connected with several institutions. Did the other institutions have any problems or did students have problems? Somebody stuck here, about to get a degree from Loyola and suddenly discovers that the program had been bought by Columbia?

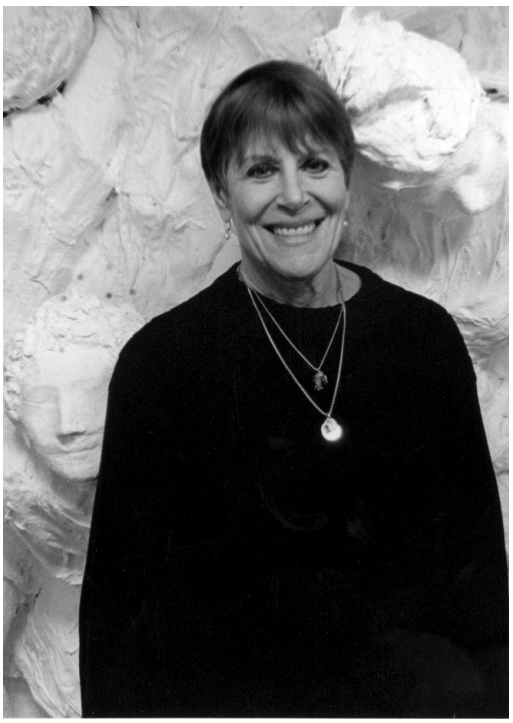
Oh no, that wasn't a problem. Our students, for the most part, have been here for what they can get for it as a human being, and some of them were in there to get a Masters degree so they'd get more money. We have a number of people who are art teachers, you know, and it's not stupefied their thought and made them go stony, in a comatose state, get your Masters degree. So they didn't care where they got it, they just knew they needed it. So, no, they were fine.

Let me go back to that. Is that your first connection with Columbia College?

Actually, no. I was a full-time faculty member in the Dance Department from 1973 to '75. I've always been a dancer in Chicago. I'm in the era of Shirley Mordine, so there were basically three of us that actually started the active dance community in Chicago: that was Maggie Kast, Shirley, and myself. When there wasn't any real dance community, we were the ones who went like, "Hey, I want to dance so I guess I gotta to get some people around me because I can't do it by myself." So we would all basically try to collect stuff and make things happen. And then when Shirley's company had a big explosion over there at the Dance Center and they left and formed Moming, and I became one of the other dancers in her company for a while. And then, I've always had this school called the Chicago Dance Center, and my partner at the Chicago Dance Center said, "You've got to come see the space. It's so beautiful you could just die." It was just above the Biograph Theater on Fullerton Avenue, on Lincoln and Fullerton. And so Bill said, "Quit that job. Let's go look for another studio, a really big one." So I went over to open up my studio again, I had my dancers still dancing over there or teaching over at the other studio. And then even the Inter-Arts Department was purchased by Columbia so then I came back, but just in the Inter-Arts Department. And then my studio went bankrupt and I fooled around for a while in the upper Northeastern area.

So you were teaching at Columbia until 1975, and then you went off on your own above the Biograph Theater?

Right, opened up a studio. Then in



'83, Larry Edwards who owned the Biograph said he wanted to open movie theaters and kick us out. And we tried to move over into Rogers Park. It was at that time where it would be cool to move into an old power station. So we found an old power station in Rogers Park, very '70s, opened up, it hadn't been used for twenty years, raised eight thousand dollars to build these floors, so we did amazing things; we opened up this new studio in Rogers Park, but not one of our students followed us. Well, they didn't want to go into Rogers Park. If I looked around the neighborhood I would have realized it had no character and I wouldn't have done it, you know? Because there's nothing that, at that time, had any real statement about anything, and people just didn't want to go into Rogers Park. They liked North Avenue a lot, they liked Wicker Park, it was like, "OK..." So we sort of lost it at that point. We didn't have a lot of backing at that point, we didn't have a lot of money in the bank to last very long. So we just folded up in August.

That was '83?

'83, right. And then I taught one class a year at every single studio in the city of Chicago, which was very interesting. And then I went over to the Dance Department at Northeastern; took a sabbatical leave and I did that for three years. But I got into trouble over there because I stood up for the students against the department chair, which is always a lethal thing to do. But I was still shocked. I thought, "I'm so glad, I'm so glad. We're doing such excellent work," which we were, you know, we had such a good thing going. "They won't dare fire me even if I do stand up against the department." But, wrong, which actually was a great blessing. I was totally shocked by some of the stuff that happened in the process of doing that. So I applied for, actually that was the first time I ever applied for a job was in my life. Because I've had this life where, you know, people have always said, "Would you like to do this?' And I go like, "Yeah, sure, why not." Then somebody else will come up and say, "Would you like to do this?" And I say, "Oh, OK, I don't mind. That would be fun." So most of the time I've just gone and done whatever it was to do. I mean, I did make a choice to have a dance company, that I did choose to do. But I never really tried to find a job. People just asked me if I wanted to work. Except this time, I actually applied for a job. The Body Movement position in the Theater Department opened up. So I actually put in an application for a job, I interviewed, actually I didn't interview. I walked in the office and Charley said, "You don't need to talk to me. You've got the job. Just fill up this piece of paper and go away." I went, "Fine."

Did he know you already?

Well, he knew Suzanne, and he knew me. I had been around Chicago a long time and I have a reputation with a lot of people and I knew a lot of people in the department. And I actually know something, the gift that the gods have given to me, which is perfect for our Theater Department. And it's also perfect for me to have a job that does not exhaust me but exhilarates me when I teach for five hours straight without a break, which is what I do, I teach from nine to two without a break. And teaching body movement, I get out of it and I feel wonderful. Whereas if I had to teach dancing, which is basically destructive to the body, I would be exhausted. So it's a great gift to me to be able to work in the Theater Department. It's also taught me a ton about what basically the gods have been pushing at me ever since I remember. I got a chance, because in dancing there's this overlay of the action of the step and the type of technique that you're doing, you know, whether or not you're doing Cunningham or someone else and how complex the combination is and are you working on your arabesque and can you do this kind of turn; so that's all overlay. Whereas in the Theater Department, all I had to do was try to teach them to be charismatic, you know? So I got a chance to really learn, in a really deep sense, what I know.

I wish we were videotaping this because I'd like to ask you to demonstrate.

Well, the information that has come to me over the years, and actually I've always been able to see people's energy flowing through their body. I used to say, I'm used to talking about it in terms of water, which I found out relatively soon along the line is what a lot of the martial arts people use, because it's a primordial image that's in your lizard mind. So if you use water images the body responds so, because basically what you're trying to do in teaching anything with the body is get visual images that the body will respond to. Because the body has a natural, kinesthetic intelligence, unlike what Howard Gardner thinks about it, which he doesn't, he doesn't know anything about it, really. But he really doesn't know what it is. Part of kinesthetic intelligence is the body's ability to sequence muscles and the proper sequence with the right amount of energies to produce a particular thing that it has a visual

image of. And you make it look exactly like that physical image, both dynamically and physically. That is you got that, "YEO!" you know, I don't know how to do that, I only, my body, if I go, "Y-e-o!" my body knows how to sequence all the muscles to make that happen with that dynamic and with that shape. So basically that's what you're trying to teach people to do. And water flowing, and you're trying to get the chi body: there's two bodies at the minimum. You know, there's seven in most systems but you've got the gross physical body or the physical body, which we honor by never calling it gross in our culture, and we have the body of chi or the chronic body or the body of light or the body of whatever you want to call it, the body of mind and the body of chi, the body of energy. And what you want to do is have the body of energy support the physical body. You put it in form and have it flow to make the physical body move. And the water images are the best images to use to do that because your deep, deep, deep, deep, deep, deepest, primordial intelligence is that of the surviving mammal, the sun, water, plants growing, you know. Those are like the three images that we respond to. We understand that because you had to drink the water or you die, you had to eat the plants or whatever, you had to know a plant from stone, and you had to know when it was day or night. So actually stars and sun, plants and water are the strongest images that people respond to. So when you make an unbendable arm, when you do this, you know, people hang off their arms. It's not muscles that's holding it, it's the water flow. You have water flowing through your arms in the martial arts when you're doing it. So I don't know if this is what you want me to be talking about but that's what I'm talking about. What do you want to know?

You began teaching in the Theater Department what year?
See, that's what I was going to look up.

About '86 or '90 or something?
Oh, '86 or '87, around in there. So it's been about ten years.

So what you were just talking about, that's kind of what you've been trying to teach students in theater?
I've always been teaching dance that way. Always teaching people to try to flow and unclog their chi lines in order to dance. But theater people want to be charismatic, you know, so what I got a chance to learn how to do is to label people, there's a lot of things about your physical body that you need to do. You're basically a four-legged animal trying to stand on two legs and operate like a four-legged animal. So you need to be able to become conscious of the base of your scapula and move your arms from the base of your scapula rather than through your shoulder sockets. And you need to use your spine really well; you need to develop a sense of sacrum because that's your sacred bone. And let that be the center of your physical body and let the center of your chi body work with it. But I got a chance to develop methods of teaching that that really, really work and are effective, you know, by trial and error, which I don't even have time to do that with dance students. I mean, I can talk about it but I'm still busy teaching other stuff. When you're teaching dancing that—to teach just that was a great gift to me because I really got to figure it out. And what was I going to say, something, whatever.

Tell me about students, what do they do? I'm asking because I really don't know. I know the movies, or I go to the theater and I see them up there but...
I would say that the truth of the matter is, I think most teachers at Columbia, you're teaching one thing: that you're really teaching people to live and become alive as human beings. I think that—did you go to the graduate ceremony?

No.
Michael Rabiger said the most wonderful thing.

That's what I heard.
It was absolutely wonderful because he said, "In most academia, what you're trying to do is stand on the top of the mountain and challenge people to come up to the mountain to knock you off. At Columbia, what we're trying to do is to look at every student that comes here and say, "You know what? There's just a ton of stuff that you could do that would make your life very exciting and you could manifest yourself with all the gifts that God gave you." And I think that's the difference between the way we teach and the way a lot of other academic institutions [teach]: we're not competitive. We don't teach students to be competitive; we try to teach students to manifest. So we have to believe that as a race, as a human population, that we are starting up, which is nothing new because the Hindus have said that for a long time. We're at a dark nadir at this point in time and we're about to start going up where the spirit is an important part of the culture. You know, spirit is not an important part of our culture. Religion is an important part of some; a controlling religion is an

important part. But individual spiritualism I think is what's coming on. You know, where God is inside of you and you're ruled by love instead of God outside of you ruled by fear. And I think in order to do that, you have to combine mind, body, spirit. Because the body is as important for spiritual growth as going to church or thinking about it with your mind. And our culture does not have anything to do with the development of the human being through the body other than how much muscle do you have and how big is it. Or, how strong are you? That's the question in our culture: How strong are you and how big are your muscles? How beautiful is your body according to the standards of beauty from whoever's setting them up.

And I think the weird thing about the whole thing is that, of course, like one of the traditional Hindu ways of achieving enlightenment is to clarify the body. It's called hatha-yoga. And so basically what I'm teaching is a clarification of the body through the chi. So it is totally useful as a theater thing because it makes you charismatic, which is what every theater student wants to be. They want to stand up on the stage and everybody go, "Wow." And by charisma, that means you're an energy star. And that's why on the little doors they say, "Oh here. She's the star." And it isn't because they think you're up in the sky, but they actually recognize you as an energy star. And nobody can resist an energy star out of the same reason that the water works. My primordialist, deepest mind is so attracted to a shining star I cannot resist you. I am totally open to you and I will not push you away if you are a star. You will have a big chance of talking to me. So basically what I'm doing is, I'm definitely teaching them to be energy stars in the theater, but along the way I also recognize that I'm teaching them, I'm also trying to teach them to deal with life. Because I think people need other people to say cool things. You know, I say to them, "Come on! You've got choices, you know? Don't be helpless and powerless. Figure out what your choices are and make a choice! Don't just stand around with a thumb in your mouth!" You know, so I say stuff like that to my students if they don't take action. Because I expect them to always be active. So while I'm teaching body movement, I'm teaching them to clarify the body through the motion of the chi and try to remove the chi blocks. Because like if this is your heart-chakra, if you close your heart-chakra for a long period of time, that makes you depressed. Whether or not you start to be depressed you'll start to go in the area of depression. I learned to open my heart-chakra. That opens all of me and leads me into not being depressed. If I had the opportunity I have much greater tendency not to be depressed when my heart-chakra's opened than when my heart-chakra's closed. And I didn't spend a lot of time in class talking about stuff like this but I recognize that when I open up their heart-chakras and teach them to keep it open, that's going to be the result. You don't teach the spiritual aspects of it, because the spiritual aspects come as a result of what you're doing, but basically that's what I'm doing. And I feel like everybody's chosen to do something. You're given a gift, you know, in your life. And if you end up being happy what you've done is sort of try to manifest whatever gift that it is that you've gotten and try to use it well. I've just been given this information. I started combining Eastern mysticism with Western physicality. I've done a lot of bodybuilding. My degree, my training's in mathematics, I'm a mathematician, so I'm very interested in axiomatic systems and finding out what the fundamental principles are that underline any system of thought. So it's probably why I figured it out because I'm the right person to give this stuff to because I go like, "Oh, that's interesting. I wonder why he would do that, you know?" and I thought, "You know, that's even farther down than that. What are the real principles upon which you're building the system, you know?" And there are of course many ways of doing it and I happened to meld one that actually really works. It's very simple, as Einstein said, it's really, really simple. Also, all the principles of systems that I use are principles that work in every other aspect of your life. So it unifies, you know, the way you treat your children, the way you buy your groceries, the way you go to sleep at night with the way you move, and the way you think about your body, So...

I want to follow up on your students a little bit, you mentioned your students. Let me go back, can we go back a minute when you were teaching dance?

Yeah. I still teach dance.

You still teach dance?

I have a dance company and I still do dancing myself, trying to figure out what it means to be fifty-two year old dancer. You know, we have a culture that doesn't accept that, you know, which is interesting. But what do you want to know about teaching dance?

Well, I wanted to go back to the, I'm curious about who the students were and what it was like teaching dance in '73 to '75.

Well, the same students that are here now. I mean, there's just a ton of people in the world that want to dance. Even a lot of people that don't have a desire to dance professionally recognize that, you know. Shiva is said to be a dancer because dancing is one of the things that the body needs to do. The body needs rhythmic dancing, the body needs to move out, go in, the body needs to be connected and the body needs to be joyful. And you feel better when your life is better and your body is able to dance. And once again our culture does not promote this thought, especially for men, who are not supposed to dance because it's supposed to be a bad thing for you to do. You know, it makes me very sad that we feel that way. Hopefully, maybe someday that will change. I mean, I have a two-year old grandson. He demands to dance every night. He takes you up, points to the boombox, wants you try put on The Nutcracker Suite or some other piece of classical music so he can dance, and twirl, and close his eyes and feel the pleasure of moving his body. And we've removed that from our culture to a certain extent. In the '70s there was such a revolt, you know, when the young people revolted, one of the things that they revolted into was dance. So in the late '60s, '70s, into the early '80s, if you were going to a dance class in the city of Chicago you had to get there early because there was going to be a line and not everybody was going to get in. I mean, it's that wonderful. The health clubs started taking over and the aerobics people got into the other thing because they got less into art and more into making money, which of course is fine, you know, whatever you need to do. But there's tons of dance students, people that want to feel that experience.

How many—when you were teaching in the '70s, were these mostly students who were planning to be majoring in dance at Columbia?

Everything, everything that you can think of: women with five children, people that weighed two-hundred and fifty pounds, we've got people like that in our program, not too many of those, a few people that wanted to dance but wouldn't be technically good enough to get into a dance company, and just tons of other people that just wanted to dance, wanted to feel the experience of motion, wanting to know what it felt like to be connected and in touch with gravity. Because that's another thing that dance does for you; it connects you to the universe because you can't dance well if you don't connect with gravity. And you have to sing an accurate, dynamic gravitational song in order to be a good dancer, which means that you have to be in synch with what goes on in the universe. Which to a certain extent connects you to the stars and makes your life better in a deep sense. It's interesting, isn't it?

Yeah.

Yeah. And I feel so bad that we've done that to almost every man in our culture, cut them off from that experience. Because in most cultures it is the men who would dance first and the women will fit in the dance second. You know, the men were the ones because they took over; you know, the Sufis, the Sufi dancers were all men. There were no female Sufi dancers.

I never thought about that. This is Western culture, American culture. Where the men don't dance.

I think that it's only in Western culture that the men don't dance, you know? It's what happened during the time when they burned all the books in the Dark Ages and everybody was a heretic; they were trying to remove physical mysticism out of the structure of thought because at the end points of physical mysticism is magic. If anybody practices it long enough, you can do things other people can't do with magic. And that was not an OK thing in Christianity. I mean, that's why the secret doctrine has always been passed down by word of mouth instead of being written down. But it was always passed around because they killed all the people that knew it. It was a very dangerous thing to have information about the Kaballah or Tantric yoga in your person. You were very dangerous to people in power because you could teach people to be free. And you could teach people to activate your charismatic body. They didn't want you to do that; they wanted to control you. So they sacrificed all the people that knew that, burned all the books, removed it all from the language. I mean, there's not a word for the chi body in the English language. It's in every other culture of language. I mean, Japanese call it qui, the Chinese call it chi, the Indians called it pranja, people in the islands in the South Pacific call it something else, in South America I think they call it manna. So there's a name for the energy body in almost every culture except for Western culture, which has no word for it, which is the ultimate form of censorship because then you can't think about it,

because there's no word for it. Because words are magic. It's like erasing the nose off of the Egyptian statues. You erase the thought or the capacity to do something.

Tell me, in the '70s, was this a political thing at Columbia? Is this a political issue, you think it's political?

Oh, absolutely, absolutely. I mean, it was the young people taking off their clothes, taking off their bras, saying, "Screw you, we don't want to make money. We want to experience ourselves. We want to live our lives, we want to explore things." It was also the advent of the first information about Eastern culture that came into the West through the average person, not through the universities. Because the Beatles met the Maharishi, you know, and brought transcendental meditation, which everybody was doing at that period of time, which involved the body and the mind and all that stuff. And the ideals of spiritualism through the body started to come into the culture. I mean, I definitely think it's a political thing.

And from that period, who were some of the people that you remember best from Columbia College?

People I remember? Throughout that period at Columbia it was the Dance Department. It was Shirley and all of her dancers, who became the socialist revolutionists of the time. Tem Harwitz, some of these guys, it's very funny, they're children of very rich people, who were very socialistic when it came to everything except that if they wanted to take a trip they used their parents' credit card and went. Tem Harwitz is actually one of the biggest developers in the city of Chicago now. Donna Sugarman, whose father actually bought the Dance Center, he was a big producer in New York in the theater or television, I'm not sure which one. Eric Trules was totally poor, a great, wonderful guy. Totally wacko, a ton of fun, way out there, ended up going to clown school down in Florida. Suzy Kimmelman, who ended up doping a lot of tai chi teaching and actually a great spirit. And Jackie Radis, who ended up running Moming. Those were the people who were the major people in the Dance Center, and Shirley. And those were the people at Columbia. Then there were other people outside of Columbia; Maggie Kast, who was doing work down by the University of Chicago. Myself, I was working on the North Side and there weren't any others. I mean, we were the ones who started it.

And when you were at Columbia, where was the Dance Center?

The Dance Center's on Sheridan Road and Lawrence.

But was it there at the time you that you taught?

Yeah, it was there. It originally was over in the old studios on Wells Street. You know, Charlie Chaplin Studios. But by that time, the time I got there, Donna Sugarman's father had bought the Dance Center, which is now a movie theater, so they could have a real home with lights and all that other stuff so that they could actually produce theatrical stuff. And my company danced there all the time because I loved the Dance Center as a performance space, a great black box theater. So we'd dance there a lot.

So did you get, I'm curious, what kind of sense of connection did you feel to what was going on in that 540 building?

None, none whatsoever. I'm just telling you, I just knew the dancers. I mean, I've always known that Columbia was a place where if you were a working artist you could work. And it didn't make any difference if you were degreed. But the one thing you had to do was be good at what you were teaching, as a practicing artist. And you know, I love that idea, but I didn't really know anybody. I actually don't know a lot of people now, which I think is true of a lot of Columbia faculty, because we're out doing our stuff. And I'm fine with that, you know, I don't feel bad about not knowing all the people in the English Department. It's like, that's fine, "Blah, blah, blah, teaches there." And I'm like, "Yep. Probably true, but I can't help you." I know the Theater Department pretty well, because I'm there. I know the Dance Department; I don't have time for the rest of it. And since most Columbia teachers don't develop politics, most of us don't care about politics, you don't get into that stuff, which is also good.

Did you have any connection to people like Mike Alexandroff...

I always loved Mike Alexandroff. I loved what he did. I loved the fact that this guy took this little nothing blob and manifested his thought, you know, turned his heart and spirit into an institution. You know, I think that's just the coolest thing in the world. That's what I was talking about manifesting yourself. I think that's the only way you can be really happy is to figure out, "What can I possible do for the everyday people, for the common people?" And do it. What I say is to my children is, you know, "My goal is to somehow increase the aesthetic energy of the universe; take the sound up maybe one fraction of a decibel in my lifetime. If I can do that, fine. As long

as I don't drag it down and make the sound lower and rumbly. I want to take it up just a notch and make it a little leaner sound, a little purer sound, that's cool." I think Mike did that and I think everybody who saw this place grow went like, "Cool," you know, "Great, what a concept." And the whole philosophy of teaching here, it is just excellent. It's the only kind of place I can teach, I'll always teach the way I teach but it gets me into trouble, like it did at Northeastern. Because I would never teach for the administration, I would never teach for the money. I would never teach for something I couldn't believe in. I'd rather go jump off a bridge.

Have you ever gotten in trouble with people?

Basically, no. I think everybody here respects anybody. If I've got a stupid thing that I think is a good idea, I'm practically willing to listen to anyone that has a counter-idea that will alter and give me more information so that I don't think what I'm thinking, you know? And I think that's everybody's attitude. I've thought of things that probably weren't so hot. But nobody attacks you for that. Suzanne goes like, "You know what? Think about it." When the Dance Center went down, I was also injured: I blew my rotator cuff off the bone. So I ruined my body. The guy that I was going with that I thought was the love of my life for the rest of my life split and my mother lost it. And I loved the Dance Center, it wasn't just I liked it, I loved it. It was a human thing to me; it was a living thing. And I really got depressed. I was superficially able to act because I'm always able to do that. I've got enough will power that I can always keep myself going. But I was just so stunned. I was unable to experience inside, I was just injured very terribly. I've also been an alcoholic so in the process of becoming a recovering alcoholic I had a therapist who would say, "Move your feet, doesn't matter what you're doing. Try to think of something that would be good for you, but keep your feet moving." The worst thing in the world, when you're not doing well, is to try to stop or stand still. Go! Go! And the more you get depressed, faster, harder, go. So I decided that I would go through the graduate program myself, the one that I'm teaching at the Inter-Arts program. So Lya Rosenblum very beautifully gave me a fellowship to go through the program and I went through the graduate program and got my degree. Which I knew from all the years that I taught in it, it's a human-altering program. It's a spiritual program, really; it is an academic program, but it's more of a spiritual program because people come out of it knowing who they are what they've got to say, how they're going to do it, and they're not afraid. And so I went like, "OK, what am I going to do?" So I went throughout this program and it changed me because I was really gone to a large extent, and it filled me up again. So it was good to be a different person. I have a completely different outlook on everything, which is hopefully something you keep doing about every seven years.

What are some of the things that you did in that program? I'm interested in this because I've interviewed some people who are undergraduate students here but now we have a graduate student.

What you do in the program is, you're thrown into five studio classes almost immediately where you have to create in art forms that you know nothing about, really. You take moving images, you have to choreograph work, learn to move, correctly choreograph work. You take sound images, you write music. You do visual images, you paint, draw, create sculpture. Word images; you write. And dramatic images; you create interactive, creative stuff. Well, you've got fourteen weeks and the standards are very high. So you go in and we have some magical teachers in our program. So you go like, "Oh my God, I have to write this piece of music, it's next week. And then I perform it, I not only have to write it, I have to perform it." So, but the truth of the matter is you find your aesthetic soul really fast. Because these things are scary for a lot of people, I mean, performing is just hugely scary for a lot of people. Even people who are still visual artists, when they get up there they don't feel, they've never felt comfortable in their bodies and they're supposed to do not just a movement work but an artistic work, which means it's hoped that it will be meaningful to other people looking at it, which is a big deal. And they find out that they can actually do that. Because most of the time I'm an initiator, which most of the people in our program are. In other words, I'll alter your body just by your being with me. So I can tell you something and show you to do something and touch you and you'll actually start doing it. So actually the second week of the choreographic program, people do really cool work. They sit and look at each other and go, "Wow, that's great. Gee." And they're really moved by it, not falsely, it is moving. Because people that have spirit—we don't take people without spirit; we don't take basically young souls in our program. We only take souls that are struggling to become and they

find out that they can become in so many areas.

The thing that happens when you're in an art form where you have no skills is that you have to do the essential part of it. You can't because your only skill is to cover it up. You can't draw a hand beautifully, so you have to draw something deeper in your soul. So what happens in doing these things, because we don't have superficial skills, you have to do the fundamental thing, and that is connect that idea into what you have to say as a human being. So people find out very quickly what they're trying to do in their lives. Over the period of a year, by the time they get to the end of it, we take them up to Lake Geneva for a week and we do nothing but art for a week in Lake Geneva, which is probably the first time these people have ever had the chance, or the luxury, of not washing the dishes, walking the dog, going to work, and taking care of the children, you know, all the other things that people have to do; and their mothers and their fathers were in the hospital and blah, blah, blah. And all these art forms that had been floating around like this is their essence, they do things, "Boing!" And all of a sudden people start having realizations about themselves as human beings and what their issues are and how they can manifest the expression of those issues through art. And it just changes people because of that. And then they go on the second year and start manifesting, figuring out how to manifest it. It's just a very challenging program and to produce an interdisciplinary production where you're doing film maybe and choreographing a movement work with five people and writing text and doing all these other things, it's just a bodily experience that brings you in contact with some of the powers that you have, but that you really had no idea that you were able to manifest.

I mean, one of the things that happened to me was when I was in the fifth grade I wrote a poem and the teacher that I had told me that it wasn't any good. And I am very stubborn; I'm also very sensitive. It hurt my feelings just extremely deeply. Because I thought the poem was beautiful and wonderful, and to me it expressed my deepest feelings. And I never wrote again. I was smart enough to proficiency out of every English class that ever existed and I never took any, you know, I just wouldn't write. I would write a letter but I wasn't about to write anything creative. And so I took this writing course and I had a lot of trouble writing. And I didn't do it the right way because dancing is basically abstract. We're dealing with big abstractions, writing is basically specific. So I would write these big abstractions and Steve Lovy would say, "No, no, no, no, no, no, no. This is meaningless to anyone else." And I remember one night I said, "OK, I'll go out and do it again." I started crying. I sat outside Steve's door for two and a half-hours crying and trying to write. I would bring it back in, he'd keep going, "Better, but not good enough." And I would go back out in the hallway and cry again. But in the end, I love to write now. I do a lot of writing. I actually took a graduate writing course. I mean in the graduate school, not in the interdisciplinary program. I took a graduate writing course, I got an A. I even got published. This is the kind of program it is. How could I, who hasn't written since the fifth grade, go into a graduate writing class and be successful? And our program gives you the kind of guts and insight to be able to do that.

Tell me about some of your fellow students in this program when you were a student.

OK. There are so many students because I was teaching these students as well as being with them, so it's all blended together. Who was in my class? I really actually have to go and sit down and look at who was in my class because I have this relationship with every student and they all look the same to me. And I don't know whether he or she was in class or not. And also because I don't separate myself as a teacher from my students, I don't ever feel the difference. So I don't know whether I was in class with them, or they were in class with me, or who was in class with who. So I don't really have that recollection. My recollection...

What's your sense of them?

What's my sense of the students?

Yeah.

Oh. What happens in our student body is we graduate almost everybody that comes in, which is probably really unusual for any graduate program. We have twenty-four people come in, we go out with twenty-three. And the other two have gone because we really want them to go usually, or something happens. But the students form a family. Each one of our groups forms a family and they support each other and help each other and cheer for each other and love each other. And so it's a very intimate thing that you do. Even though, as I tell you, I can't remember specifically who it was because it happened every year and it's been twenty-one years and it's a lot of students.

So tell, you were saying that you remember teachers.
Yeah.

What do you remember about them, what do you remember?
I remember the Friedlichs; they're people that I know. I was really interested to see how other people teach, because it was very cool for me to have that experience, because I know each of the teachers in our program is a master and each of them is an initiator and a magical person. It was just a hoot for me to go in and see how each of them came at what they were doing. But I learned, you know, so much about everything, you know. As I said, I learned about writing. I had no clue how to write and I didn't know how you'd ask anybody to write. But I could actually lead somebody in writing exercises now after being in that class. And I know how to free somebody up to think because I do; we work with kids a lot. And I feel very confident in leading them to writing things and into painting and stuff like that, which they do usually in our programs because they are multi-disciplinary rather than just movement programs.

Let me go back to the College as a whole. This is an open enrollment institution. What does that mean, in the work you're doing? Or, what has it meant in the past?
It's a good and bad thing of course, like everything else. The wonderful thing is it permits people who have never manifested their potential to all of a sudden get the lights turned on. So I, as a teacher, took this wonderful privilege; taking somebody who was, knowing there was something and kind of going, "Duh, duh, duh." And watching them focus and going, "Whoa!" That to me is, I love insight. That's why people do mathematics, because of the kick of insight. It's basically a drug habit because you love to watch that mesh. You love to experience the mesh yourself; you love to watch the mesh on somebody else happen. And that to me is how I teach, you know, when I'm poking around. I'm a problem solver so when I teach I poke around, try to find out where the parts are, what's trying to mesh, and then trying to see if I can help it to mesh. And open enrollment kids, a lot of them have not been on a steady, developmental path. So there's a lot of latent, great stuff that hasn't been on the developmental path. So when it meshes, it's so exciting to watch. It just goes BANG, you know, it just explodes. And kids that have their first aesthetic experience and go and find themselves are so beautiful. There is an innocence to the energy and a beauty to the energy that I don't think is possible with somebody who has always been a good worker, you know? So on that side it's great. That's why I like teaching at Northeastern because most of those kids are English as a second language, never had an aesthetic experience in the Western art world, never been encouraged to do that. You know, so to me that's the greatest. I'd much rather teach in a place where that's a possibility than teach in a very controlled, very sedate environment where everyone has been steadily working without any kind of big side stuff going on. So to me that's great. I do think there's enough steady people who are exciting.

And the downside of it is, like their writing and their speaking is just atrocious. I keep saying to them, "You're really bright, aren't you? You think you're bright." "Yeah." "Well, you know, if I read what you write, I think you're really stupid. It's not like you can't fix it." So the beauty of this place is we've got things to help you do that: "Why don't you take the opportunity to fix this before you go any further along? Because if I just read what you've written I think you have no brain cell in your head and you probably don't have much potential. You know, so that's not what I feel about you, so here's the thing from the Writing Center, go. Go to the Writing Center, fix yourself up so you can write a letter that people can read and exhibit your intelligence." And also say things like, "This is a right-brain institution. A lot of right-brained people don't know how to work the left side of their brain. It doesn't mean you can't, you just haven't bothered, you know?" But it's really good to be in balance, as we've discussed, because we've talked a lot about balancing the oppositional forces in order to be in the middle, in order to be a successful human being, you know. As a mover, if you don't balance your yin and your yang, you can't be a good mover and you have to be in balance between the oppositional forces. And you have to use your right side of your brain and your left side of your brain in order to be in balance as a human being. And you're going to go out into the world. People from the University of Chicago have a lot of control, and you're going to want things from them. And when you want something from them, you have to move in their direction because they aren't going to move in yours. And so you need to go and learn how to be like that. You don't have to buy anything false in order to do it. A lot of them feel it would be buying something false.

So that's the downside of being an open enrollment institution, but I love it. I love the fact that Alexandroff gave a good chance to everybody because I totally believe in that. I never get up on anybody. I can't stand people who roll around and make judgements as to what people can do and what their potential is, you know? I think that every human being has to make that decision for themselves. And I have to keep giving you chances because some doors are slammed. That's what's the matter with Germany: people have to make a decision about what they're going to do in their life when they're fourteen. How is that possible? But they get a chance to, people at an older age, to still manifest themselves instead of closing doors in people's faces. And I totally love it.

How would you describe the mission of the College in connection to American higher education?

Well, I think exactly, I think exactly what Michael said. I think we are changing from the Piscean age into the Aquarian age. I see an age that is ruled by far and God outside of yourself. So there are people on top of the mountain shaking their fingers. We are now in the Aquarian age where God had to come from the inside of every single individual and we have to be ruled by love. In other words, we have to develop human beings that love themselves and do not operate by imposition but operate from manifestation. And as far as I'm concerned Columbia College is doing that thing. And the whole institution, all the institutions of our country need to change to that eventually, or we're going to be down the creek. So that's my position, is everybody else better turn around.

You think they are? Do you think Columbia's having an impact?

I think the whole thing down the road is about five hundred years. You know, so I don't think it's coming fast. Because I can't imagine the people at Harvard relinquishing their power that they get by being on top of the mountain. And I think it's very hard for the male, macho, American culture, the moment culture, the materialistic culture to do that. The spiritualism which I think is growing in a geometric progression will become powerful enough to affect the hierarchy. I think it's going to grow from underneath. The last things to be affected, in the general scheme of things, are things on the top. Because it's going to be a movement that happens underneath and permeates outward. I don't think that you can do it from the top because there's too much investment in the status quo at the top of anything. But I think it's going to be a peaceful revolution that's going to happen from underneath.

Do you think Columbia's had an impact, to narrow things a little, on the arts and communications media?

I think we have an impact on every student who exits here. I take fifty students every year and alter their whole view of the world. I mean, not completely, but I alter their mind/body/spirit ideas. That alters their ideas. Those people go out in the world, they meet somebody else. I think we have a terrific impact but we're not having it through the associations of university people who meet in Zurich, Switzerland. We're going to absolutely have an impact, and we do, we have a complete impact. In the city of Chicago we have a terrific impact. And I think we have a terrific impact everywhere, but it's just not maybe the kind of people who we traditionally think of impact because I'm not influencing some Harvard professor. I'm influencing people who are going to maybe someday teach there. You know, probably not, but they're going to go somewhere, they're going to influence somebody who is going to go there. Actually we do have a graduate in our program now teaching at Yale. You know, in the graduate program at Yale. I gotta go.

Oh, OK.