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### Interview with Tom Taylor, 1998

Columbia College Chicago

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## T o m T a y l o r

*...March seventeenth, is that correct? 1998, this is an interview with Tom Taylor of the Art Department.*

**I wonder if we can start out just by asking how you came here.**

I went, must have been the Spring of 1978, to the College Art Conference in New York City. I was teaching at [Humboldt] State University in Northern California. I was a full-time faculty member but I had a temporary position. So, they were able to keep me there for about four years and then that ran out so I was looking for a job. I got off an elevator in one of the hotels that we were staying in and I ran into a student who was also from [Humboldt] State University. I, of course, was a faculty member at [Humboldt] but this was a student. And he was graduating and he too was looking for a job and you know, I said to him, "How's it going?" He said, "Great. I just had the best interview that I've had, really nice guy from a place in Chicago; Columbia College in Chicago." And then this young man said to me, "Oh, I shouldn't have told you because you'll go and interview and get the job." Which is exactly what happened

**Who was the person?**

That was Ernie Whitworth. Ernie Whitworth was the chairman of the Art Department before I came. And it also turned out that Ernie Whitworth was also a graduate student prior to coming. He did his graduate work at Ohio University, which just so happens to be the place that I went to do my graduate work. And I recall, this was back in like 1970 or so, I remember doing a project as a graduate—

well, actually, I had a teaching position for a year. But back about 1970 or so, I had a group of students outside wrapping up a big sculpture and we were talking about [Cristo] and how [Cristo] wraps things up. Well, it so happens that one of the passersby that got so interested in the wrapping was Ernie Whitworth. And I never met him but he remembered me and he said, "You're the guy that was at Ohio U. doing all those weird things," and he said, "You'll be perfect at Columbia." So that's how the connection was made. Well, I got the job. In fact, in New York Ernie said, "Well, we can take care of this right now." In other words, he said, "You can have the job." And I was, "Oh gee, I don't like Chicago, it's so grimy and gritty. I just came in from Northern California and I was up in the pristine Redwood trees in Arcata, California on the ocean and I went to San Francisco." I had been to Chicago; it was February, it was gritty, it was gray. I said, "I don't know about this." And he said, "I'll tell you what, we'll fly you out for an interview." So later on, probably in March, I flew from California to Chicago and met with Ernie and went to lunch with Mike Alexandroff and Dean Rosenblum. Again, it was so small that at that time, you know, you went to lunch with the President. And again, the President didn't give a damn who Ernie hired. He said, he told me, "We can take care of this now."

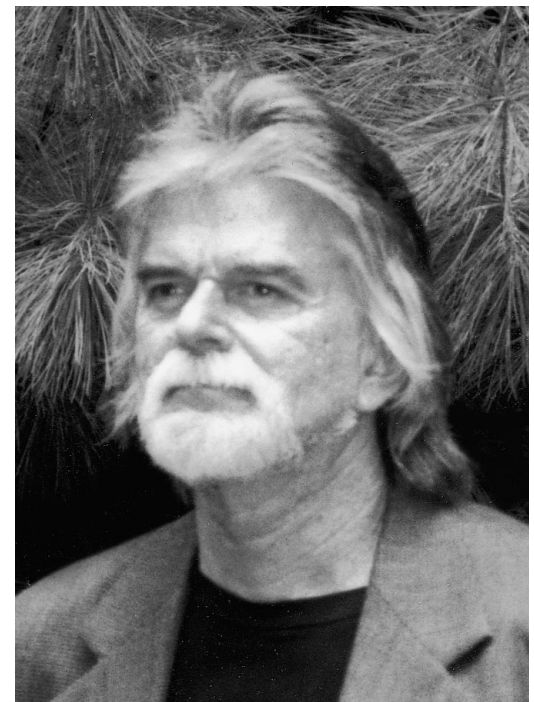
**And when you came here, where physically were you?**

Oh yes, the building that the school was then in was the 600 South Michigan Building. And the Art Department, specifically, was

on the thirteenth and fourteenth floors. And I believe, again, this is going back to about 1978, that the school had probably been in the 600 Building for about five or six years, but when I came, the school owned and occupied the entire 600 Building.

**Tell me about that. Was it crowded?**

No, not at all. And in fact, Ernie Whitworth, the chairman, was very interested in ceramics and he had a huge room for ceramics on the fourteenth floor, a really massive ceramics room. Then we had a small shop for 3D and there was one band saw and a drill press. And somebody from Photography was interested in knives and taught a whittling class. And we had a room full of looms and there was a room that was supposed to be used for graphic design and they offered some commercial art classes. The interesting thing that happened over the summer time was that Ernie Whitworth resigned



**There was reaction to that, at that point, to the institution in some ways, right?**

Right, he resigned his chairmanship. I think his wife didn't like Chicago and wanted to go back to the countryside. They have a farm downstate. So he yielded to that. And then, over the summer, I don't know who hired him, probably Lya and Alexandroff, I don't know, but John Mulvany was hired as the chairman, not only of the Art Department but also of the Photography Department, a chair he still holds. So he's the chair of both departments. Marlene Lipinski was hired to coordinate a graphic design program. I was actually hired to coordinate a craft program. There was a great interest in starting a craft program. And one other person was hired, Tony Patano was hired to run and get underway an interior design program.

**Right at the same time?**

Right, so all four of us: John Mulvany, myself, Tom Taylor, Marlene Lipinski, Tony Patano, were all hired over the summer-time, at various times prior to the start of the Fall semester. What I mean is, over the summer time, Ernie quit so there's this—I don't know when John came. But anyway, we were hired and met for the first time in September, and we were the new Art Department.

**Were there others in the Art Department?**

There were part-time people. Phyllis Branson was a part-time person; she never wanted to be full-time. And then they had something called an adjunct position. Carol McQueen was an adjunct, Owen McHugh was still here, but we were the full-timers. And we were supposed to, you know, put in place

the new program. Marlene was supposed to put in place the graphic design, I was supposed to put together a craft program, and Tony Patano was supposed to put together an interior design program.

**This is a big expansion.**

Well, it's a significant change because under Ernie it was mostly craft oriented. It was weaving and ceramics and I was supposed to expand on it. And indeed there was a woman here, whose name I have forgotten, Suzanne something, and she was a person that was working and she didn't work full-time for Columbia, but she was working on putting together a craft program. I think she was probably disappointed that she didn't get the job. So sometime after, we had an initial meeting with John and just got to know each other and figure out what's going on. A few weeks later, in a private meeting with John, I told him I needed some time to get to know what is going on in Chicago in terms of craft, to see what's going on so I could pursue. And he just said, "Forget crafts. Crafts are out, forget crafts." So, from that point on, I became the Fine Arts Coordinator.

**Now, does this reflect a difference between him and Ernie?**

Oh, absolutely. Oh God, they were as different as night and day. And again this is the thing about Columbia: it seems to me is that it was the personality of the chair and once you were a chair you could do whatever you want. So the chairs are all powerful, there's the power.

**No review by a College-wide...**

Oh God no, no. I mean, see, that was really the beauty of what Mike Alexandroff did. As you will find out in other interviews, you know, he came across this place when it

was down to like a hundred and twenty students. And it was just kind of floundering, I don't know how he acquired it, that would be a bit of interesting history. Some people say he won it in a crap game. That's just a joke but maybe not, I don't know.

**Well, his father, I think, had the job before.**

Oh, OK.

**So I understand.**

Yeah, I enjoyed the rumor.

**I don't know what else was**

**involved, that may not be enough.**

So anyway, the place was just about ready to collapse. And of course, as you know, Columbia has a rich history. Just the other day I came across the old Mary Blood, you know, in the display case with her little oratorical studies. So then Alexandroff went out and started hiring people. And he met Louis Silverstein, I guess in New York, brought him in. Who else would he have brought in? Thaine Lyman, I believe, and Al Parker and they were, you know, just doing their thing. And that kind of freedom, I mean, again, is quite exciting because you're free of the bureaucracy. Again, I was at [Humboldt] State, good school but committees and bureaucracy, "Go see the dean of this, the dean of that," which I'm afraid is starting to happen at Columbia. Now, we're getting all this bureaucracy because we're getting so big, and now we have all this administrative stuff going on; creating documents. I was on one of the self-study committees, you know, I created my portion of the study, and so did my other colleagues. So we created a document this thick and then I was told, "That's going to go to another

committee, that's going to get this thick, and then it's going to get down to here but then the whole thing is..."

**They had one of these ten years ago or something, right?**  
Ten years ago what?

**Another self-study?**  
Oh, that's right.

**Were you involved in that?**  
I kind of tried to stay away from that as much as possible. One of the things that I told John Mulvany when I came here, I said, "Keep me off committees." And he said, "No problem." And I must say, personally he's been great to me. He gave me room to learn, he gave me opportunities to follow some of my visions as to what we can do with the Art Department. So one of my things is to build up a shop. Again, when I first came here we had one band saw and one [donated] drill press that some faculty, I think it was Dave, I can't think of his name right now, Dave Avison, he was in the Photography Department, gave the school or sold the school his hacksaw. And we still have it.

**Really?**  
Yeah, I'm gonna put it in the archive. It's still running. But we have to share the shop. Now the shop, this huge shop with all kinds of tools and capabilities.

**What kind of courses did you teach when you came here?**  
Well, the new Art Department faculty, Marlene, Tony, myself, and John, we went through the courses that were being offered and started to structure a sequence of courses. For example, in the fine arts area there were courses in place. In addition to Ceramics and Weaving

there was also Painting and Drawing and 2D Design and 3D design and other few things like Mexican Saddle Stitchery. I don't think that was actually in the curriculum but that would be interesting, to dig around to see if there are any old course description books. But there were some strange courses—not that there's anything wrong with Mexican Saddle Stitchery, but that kind of shows the direction that it was going. It was like, come to Columbia, stitch a saddle, or it was—I think the intent, now that I'm thinking about this, the intent of the crafts program, and I think this might have come from Alexandroff, was to emphasize ethnic crafts, that was the big ticket. I think that was the big ticket because I believe, when I came here for the interview way back in February of '78, I believe there was a Hispanic Craft Exhibition in what is now the Museum of Contemporary Photography, and I believe that's where this notion came to my mind. They probably had some Mexican Saddle Stitchery on display. But that, I think, that's what they were up to, that's what they wanted, but that's not what John wanted. And so Alexandroff didn't say, "Well, you have to do it." I mean, again, this is my perception of it. So I put together kind of a fine arts program which consisted of foundation classes: Beginning Drawing, Two Dimensional Design, Three Dimensional Design. We put together a vocabulary of terms and said, "This is what students should be learning." For the design courses, I set up an emphasis on elements and principles of design so they'd learn terminology like positive and negative space, rhythm and repetition, texture, value, line, plane, volume; just basic stuff. So

we also started to sequence the classes so that you'd take foundation classes to learn and understand the vocabulary and to sharpen your skills, then you take upper level courses: Beginning Painting, Painting II, whatever. And so our task under John's direction was to focus on putting together a complete program in the three areas of fine arts, interior design, and graphic design. And that's what we've been working on.

**So you were really sort of setting the stage for...**

For what we have now. And now, in retrospect, I say, "Oh my God, twenty years has gone by and I haven't done everything that I want to do yet because not everything's in place that I want." I'm unhappy because we don't have a complete sculpture program. I very much want to have welding. We've offered bronze casting in the past but we did it in a very circuitous kind of way, which meant that the instructor who taught bronze casting worked here in the facility and the students made their waxes, invested the waxes, then they were loaded up and taken to her kiln for the burn out. After the burn out of several days they were then loaded up again and taken to a commercial foundry where they were poured and the students would go and watch the pour. They did everything except for actually handling the metal. And then the investments were brought back to Columbia's loading dock over here off of Harrison behind the 623 Building, and broken out. I mean, they'd break away the investments and had a big pile of rubble from breaking out the investments. Then the raw castings were hauled back up to the tenth floor where the students would sand and saw and



chase and finish their casting. But I would like to have—that worked out actually well. And the idea of the students going to a commercial foundry was good because it's not likely that a student would ever have access, or ever build their own foundry, but it's easy to make waxes and then at least then you feel comfortable approaching a commercial foundry. My analogy is feeling intimidated when you go into a lumberyard. If you don't know the vocabulary, you say, "I want a piece of wood." And then they realize that you don't know anything and then they pull this big thing over you. So when you break down that, you learn the vocabulary. So, I'm not disappointed, but my goal [is to get welding in here.] I'm going to be fifty-five in May. So if I don't get run over on Congress—I think it's my biggest obstacle in going to Columbia, sitting across from Congress Parkway.

**So-called**

So-called parkway. Yeah, it's more of a scene out of Road Rage or some violent video game. It's not that bad. Anyway, if I stay until sixty-five and I don't drop over dead after this interview—which I probably will, it's been too much stress—I have to amuse myself. So I go into a satire kind of comedy mode. Sometimes I don't tell people that and they don't understand going into, you know, comedy mode. My goal, hopefully—I'd really like to get a welding facility.

**Could you do that in this building?**

No, that's one of the problems. But we could do it somewhere. And I just haven't pushed enough. You kind of get comfortable, you back off, and, you know, you cruise

along for five years and then you wake up and say, "Oh my God, it's time."

**Let me ask you to put all this into the context of the mission of Columbia College. Where does this fit?**

Well, one of the missions, of course, that I think we've always been following is the notion of having an environment where students can work with practicing artists, professional artists. And we certainly have that in the Art Department. I mean, there's really wonderful artists for these young people to work with: Pat Olsen, Vern Samuels, Joan Weiner, who's retired, Hollis Sigler, who is a full-time faculty member. So we've had, that was one of the visions of Alexandroff, was people could come and work with the people that do it.

**Has there been a change in this?**

Not in the Art Department, it's still there. There's all of these incredible [faculty], the department has experienced an incredible growth and expansion of our programs and the growth and expansion of the facilities for each of the programs, absolutely. The students, I mean, if you took a walk with me now we'd go down each hallway and we would see the students working with people that are teaching what they do, whether it's in fashion design, graphic design, interior design, fine arts...

**Do you see that changing?**

I don't think it's gonna change. I think that we'll have more and more of the artist/educator/technician. It's kind of like, we don't need a lot of full-time faculty. We need faculty who are full-time to oversee and regulate but, again, I think we need well-paid faculty/artists/technicians, and it might be all in one

person. And I suppose people still might want a degree, but then again, maybe the degree isn't going to be the thing anymore, especially if it becomes so pricey. I think there's a good possibility the students will get a two-year Associate's degree with a real focused concentration on what they want to do. And of course this thing, the computer, is drastically changing how students are getting information, and more and more campuses are developing the so-called virtual classroom. That's never, at least I don't see that changing the direct hands-on in the fine arts area. In the fine arts area we will always—at least as long as I have anything to say about it—we will always, you know, be drawing with a pencil and not a mouse and we will always be carving a piece of wood; we won't be doing a virtual carving. Although that will be happening, it will be happening, and probably in the Art Department we'll always have what I consider to be the direct, hands-on experience. And interestingly enough, I think as more and more people work with the computer, there's a desire to get their hands on something tangible. I've had more students come out of the computer lab and just want to have a tactile experience. You're kind of burned out on this thing, because as fascinating as it is, and as amazing as it is, it's also very disappointing. I jokingly say, "I'll get interested in the computer when it's like the computers on Star Wars, where you have not virtual reality but you have interactive holograms and where you can't distinguish anymore between reality and..." And of course there's some that say we're already holograms, we just don't know whose hologram it is. It's such a sophisti-

cated hologram that we don't know, we're drifting. But in terms of your question, where are we going, I think that the emphasis on the hands-on and the traditional studio format where you work with clay, you work with charcoal, you work with oil or acrylic, you work with wood, I think that will always be sustained at Columbia as part of the Fine Arts department.

**What about graphic arts?**

We could walk down to the ninth floor—we're on the tenth floor now—we could walk down to the ninth floor and you'll see huge layouts of students sitting in front of monitors. And that's apparently what they have to do. Of course, it changes so damn quickly, by the time they learn one program it'll all change. And verbal command is coming so how long is it going to be before the executive offices just sit around with the computer and say, "I've got an idea for a new corporate logo. Let's run some ideas past. Computer, show me some stuff!" And fortunately, or unfortunately, well, I don't know. Now what you're bringing up is what we like to think of as the saving component, in that the students or somebody still is going to have to have a sense of composition and a sense of line and a sense of that. You really think so? You seen the Miller ads? Those are almost anti-aesthetic, you know? So who knows? I'm just talking, you know, but I have no idea. It's kind of like tastelessness and kitsch becomes fashionable...

**Let me ask about the mission of the College in the context of higher education.**

Well...

**I guess art education.**

Oh, art education. Well, you know, again, this is teaching in terms of

the Art Department?

**Yeah.**

Well, I don't know if this is answering your question or not but I think we're pretty good in a sense that we're fairly traditional in terms of what we offer. And if you go to art departments around the countryside you'll probably find a commonality. You know, they always talk about the uniqueness of Columbia, and I think they've tried to emphasize and say that the uniqueness of our experience is, again, this business of having the working professional. And I think as you go nationwide, that's not going to be so unique anymore as more and more institutions bring in more and more part-time people. I think our uniqueness is partially because of where we are and having access to the city. So how do we fit in with the mission, what was your question, the mission of the College? And other institutions... Let's think about this for a while because there's all sort of things bubbling into my head.

**Do you think Columbia's had an impact on education elsewhere?**

Apparently it has. I mean, we hear that it has. I mean, we read about it as being, but I'd like to, when I was first, the first faculty retreat started.. Oh God, when was the first faculty retreat? But the idea is Dean Rosenblum got the monies to have retreats. The first retreat was at a place that was like an old abandoned high school, it was a strange place. And we went to this thing, we the full-time faculty. It was just a handful of us, we all fit in one room and we had these monastic kinds of rooms we stayed in. It was a strange place. I don't know, somebody said that some organizations used it for weekend workshops

where they did a lot of primal screaming and...

**Is that what you did?**

That's what we did. Oh, there was some primal screaming going on because then I started to learn more about the structure and politics of Columbia, but that's another story. At the retreat we had a so-called facilitator who came in to run the retreat. And he was sort of viewing Columbia as an outsider and projecting where it would go. And he charted, I remember him charting the life and growth of an institution. But then he talked about an institution kind of peaking and then becoming just like every other institutions. And I wonder that if as Columbia has climbed—and there's concern, you know, people talk about the old Columbia and we look back wistfully at the good old ward boss politics, you know what I mean? Columbia's model for structure in the old days, well, people use the term like ma and pop operation, but it was also like Chicago politics. You know, so the President of the College is like the mayor. And then you have, what do you have, aldermen, and then you have ward bosses, precinct captains. And see, that model at Columbia, I'm kind of being sarcastic but there's some truth to it, because it's kind of like going to the President's Office or going to the chairman and saying, "Well, let's make a deal." And I hope that my drawing that kind of analogy doesn't taint it, but I think it's a fun analogy. And I have to amuse myself. But there's a lot of truth to it in the structure. In other words, you didn't go to all these committees, you went to the boss and you said, "This is what I want." "Fine, you have it." And I don't think there's any secret that Suzanne Cohan wanted the Paper Center so

she went to the boss. “Here’s a wedding present for you, here’s the Paper Center, boom!”, you know? That’s how things—the Center for Black Music Research, Sam Floyd suggested that to Alexandroff, and, “Sounds like a good idea, do it! Here’s your archive.” So now we have it, you know? So that’s how things happen.

And I don’t know, going back into this, at the retreat Bill Berkowitz talked about the life and death of an institution. Well, we’re kind of up on this plateau now. We’re starting to maybe crest a little bit and we’re starting to become [traditional], maybe, although we still have a lot of good things going on and I’m very proud of all the things going on in departments—you see all this stuff going on, still a great place. But we’ve become so big where now we have this heavy it seems to me, bureaucracy that’s on top of us. I mean, there’s dean of this, there’s dean of this, there’s a Dean of Despair, there’s the Dean of Aggravation, you know? It’s just endless. And then all the sub-deans, and they try to generate things. As an example, we used to have an in-department evaluation, we would evaluate our faculty. They would come back to me as the Fine Arts Coordinator, he’d read them, get them right back to the part-timers. Now, there’s a scan sheet that goes to the Dean of Student’s Office and I see it four weeks after the semester has begun. So I haven’t even had a chance to look at them to see how our new part-timers are like: bureaucracy. So I guess I’m saying this—again, this is an archival effort, and I’m just kind of giving you my perspective. And you talk to somebody else and they say, “Oh, that’s Taylor, he’s full of it.” But it’s my perspective...

So, what’s going to happen in the future? When Duff leaves, when Bert Gall leaves? I hope that enough of the old timers that can hopefully maintain something of the-well, you see, there’s good and bad to everything. There’s good and bad to the over-administrated democracy for everyone and there’s awkwardness to it. Again, my experience in the state school is that you get bogged down: Can I sharpen my pencil? Well, you have to see the Dean of Pencils. And he’ll submit it to a committee and we’ll review your request and by the time your request is written off or denied—you don’t even need it anymore. And the thing I liked about Columbia is being more spontaneous. And I don’t know if we can maintain that spontaneity anymore but perhaps we can; if the autonomy of some of the departments can be maintained, I don’t know. For example, again, this is to say to the Art Department, “You guys know what you’re doing. We’ll leave you alone.” And rather than the Dean of Students coming in and starting to give us our evaluation and now we have to fill out this and now we have to do this, I don’t know. Again I have ambiguous feelings about it because, again, if you have a ma and pop store or you get along well with the mayor, what the hell else do you need? But there’s a lot of people that don’t, and then you have some kind of contentiousness. I think one thing that we have to be very careful of and one thing that Columbia’s been doing wrong, is pulling in all of these students and gleaning their grant money and sending them on their way. If we’re going to be an open enrollment school, I think you can maintain a standard. And you have to have met at least this standard and then you can go on your way. But if the College has some sort of standardized testing—which

we’ve started—and we see that the student is really in trouble, that there’s just not a chance in hell that they’re going to make it, then to revive them and give them some kind of alternative, not necessarily slam the door in their face—again, maintain an open door but keep it open for people who are going to survive. I don’t believe that, and I think Columbia’s been at fault for letting people in that they know damn well are not ready.

**Now was this always true?**

I think so. It’s just like this big revolving door. You have this big influx of students coming in and certain ones are just not going to make it, but that’s OK because you have another whole pile of students who are gonna come in. And the statistics of it would be look at the graduation rate of the students that started. But most of our graduating students are transfers, so what happens to these freshmen, and are they really enriched? I think there used to be kind of a philosophy: Well, if you can go to Columbia for just one month, one year, one semester, you’ll be that much better for it. I don’t know if you are. I think to really get an enriching college experience you have to, you know, have some positive experiences and not get basically flunked out or failed. I don’t think that’s a positive experience. And again, all of this would have to be qualified, talked about in detail. So these are just general questions. I guess we’re still answering that question about Columbia and how it fits into other institutions and we’re kind of pecking away at it.

**Well, let’s turn around and look at the arts in Chicago. Where does Columbia fall in there? Specifically the Art Department**



**Where does it fit in?**

In the Art Department, we've been a little slow in neglecting some of the more current activities in performance and installation. Now, we do have a class called New Art and we do have a class called Performance Art. And we're trying, so we're kind of coming up to speed with that. I think our next full-time faculty member that we hire will be someone who's very much into electronics and computers... the use of videos, computers, video/computer art installation. So, in terms of Chicago art, we haven't been that strong reflecting performance. And we will have the capability here, but it won't be the main interest. I think the main interest—over the long haul—is going to be the traditional; hopefully more sculpture. Performance and installation, I think that will pass like what happened in the '60s and before that with the Dadaists. So it's just there, it goes along, it's a part of me, it's a part of our history. I, personally as an artist, I have no interest in video, I am interested in [Non Jung Pike], stacks of television sets and things; that sort of thing which I find very humorous sometimes. The performance artist, for the most part, can't do much for me. I'd rather see a well crafted stage production than see an artist lying under a blanket on the LA freeway—Chris Burden, who subjects himself physically—it doesn't interest me at all. So Chicago, in terms of what's going on, I think we're not a cutting edge art school. We do the best we can with the students who come through here, and some of our students are excellent, some of them are very poor, some of them we work with as much as we can, and it doesn't seem like it's getting through and others are just laughing at us...

**Tell me about students when you first came here, were they different?**

I don't think that—well, I suppose the students now are much more career oriented, perhaps. Which, you can't blame them. I mean, Columbia's still a bargain, what, nine thousand a year. And students take on this incredible debt, which is a horrible thing to have when you leave school, to leave school with a debt that used to be what your house debt would be. I mean, thousands of dollars in debt... So, I think our students now are perhaps more career orientated. This thing has to pay for itself, in other words. And the parents or whoever aren't as willing to pay for the college experience. And maybe that's what college results in for some people. It never was for me, I thought of college as being, ideally, a place where you come together with things that interested you—whether it was philosophy or English or writing or theater or dance—it's this incredible resource. And you took a part in that dance for a while. That was my experience and four years later I was walking down the hallway and I said, "Well, what are you gonna do now, Tom?" And I said, "Gee, I don't know." And I said, "Would you like to go to graduate school?" And I said, "OK." That is literally how it happened. I mean, my life has been sort of serendipitous, things fall into place. I can't suggest that to everybody, I can't advocate serendipity as an approach, but it's always worked for me. I always feel like when I pull back a little bit, things fall into place. When I push too hard, things fall apart.

**Do you think that when you came here the students were... More serendipitous?**

**Yeah.**  
Probably.

**More experimental?**

Yeah, I think so. And again, you know, Columbia in the '60s, Columbia was a place that all the kids knew about and their parents didn't know about. So it was a really fabulous kind of alternative, I wouldn't say hippie, but it was an alternative kind of a place. And now, now we've become more traditional. We've grown old... I just liked the long hair (*laughs*). Bert Gall, has anyone talked about Bert Gall?

**Sure.**

Bert Gall used to have hair way down to his shoulders. And I remember doing a project with my Design class in the front of the Michigan Avenue Building, this was the 600 Michigan Avenue Building. It was a warm spring day, and this was, again, the kind of spontaneity that I felt. I was on my way to Columbia to meet my Three-Dimensional Design class, and I was thinking, "Boy, it would be nice to do something outside." So I had it all planned in my mind between leaving home and getting to Union Station and walking to school, or taking a bus. I had it all worked out. For some reason, we had a stack of plastic tubes. In fact, I still have one (presents tube and *laughs*). Now this then is just about the height of the tube and I had my class seal up the base of them. And we made this special little base and sealed it up so it wouldn't leak. It didn't have junk in it—as you see now—we filled them up with water. And we put them in place in front of the school. There's a grid pattern in the sidewalk. So at the intersection of each of the lines for the detailing of the sidewalk, we put a plastic tube. So we had the whole front of the building with these tubes standing



in front and they were full of colored water. And it took just minutes to do it because we found an outlet some place, we ran a hose and we poured water into them and it was beautiful. And this is the truth, actually, there was a person in a wheelchair. And he rolled through these things and he liked it so much, he turned around and rolled back through them again. Because they were at his eye-level and he was seeing all these neat colors; they were blue and yellow and green. And people were walking through them, they were not a hazard or any kind of, if they would fall over, I mean the worst thing they could do is maybe spill some colored water... Bert Gall, I have this image of Bert Gall running through the lobby of the Michigan Building with his long hair like a gazelle, "We can get in trouble for this, we can get in trouble." He's like the Dean of Panic, he loves panic, he loves crisis.

Not too long after, a squad car rolls up, Chicago Police. The Police Department shows up, we're not too far from the Congress and the Hilton. What's going to happen, "Hey, looks like we've got some stuff going down. Looks like there's some activists. They've got colored water in tubes, it looks like trouble." So they just drove by quietly. And then there was a policeman and he had pulled out some things and he was looking at some things and some of my students—I have photographs of all of us because Kevin Cassidy, who's been here as a student and now he's here as a shop facilitator, he took photographs of all of this. And basically, after talking with the police, they said, "Well, if you want to do this sort of thing you have to get permission from..." And you go back to the mission statement, see, I took quite

literally what it said in Columbia's brochure, it said: Chicago is your campus. So I said, "What? Chicago's our campus? Let's go on campus." And you see, I was in violation of a code. If you're going to do anything on the sidewalk you have to get a letter. Well, if we had gotten a letter, you know, of permission, we would have had to see the alderman and he would've said, "You want to do what?" So we just did it. It was guerilla art. And that was the last time we ever did anything outside the building. Now there's another whole thing we can talk about some other time, which is the Sculpture Garden down at the Eleventh Street, which has a beautiful—well, it's a work in progress.

**We're running out of time here I'm afraid. At some point we need to come back and do another hour. Let me, if we have a minute here, let me just ask you about your own vision of education, your personal vision of education. Has it changed based on your experience here?**

I think the mission of teaching and my idea of teaching hasn't changed. I think it's remained a constant. A teacher is always, I think, at his or her best when they share and try to bring out the best in their students; to try to, enlighten sounds like an awfully pompous word, but to familiarize students with, to make them aware, of their own potential, to make them do the best they can with what they have. I've always been very patient and kind to my students. I've always respected them as individuals and I think that the maintenance of the individual is critical and the celebration of the individual is critical. So, in terms of my teaching, I think it's always been in the maintenance of the individual and the respect of the individual. In specific classes I

feel, for example, my Three-Dimensional Design classes, I feel it's my responsibility and interest to share with them what I know about the subject in a coherent, honest way.

**Has that changed at all?**

I don't think so. For example, when I first met Ernie Whitworth he was crawling around this [Cristo] transformation that we were doing, and now the projects are more kind of table top and, you know, you can't put the art outside the building. But my, I don't think the spirit of it has changed. I mean, the product has kind of changed, you know. And at the time I first started teaching in 1969, 1970, we abandoned the classroom; it was appropriate to abandon the classroom. The classroom had failed us so we said, "Screw the classroom," and we left it. I mean, we were wandering around doing the guerilla things, kind of. You know, we'd buy a couple of tons of ice and stack it up, it was kind of like—that's what this thing was, this was a more sophisticated spontaneous thing. And I still think, you know, if I was to go to a bunch of students right now and said, "I've got a bunch of plastic tubes. We're gonna take them outside and fill them with water," I think they'd lap it up. I think a lot of our students are burned out on being students. They don't listen, they're tired of listening. They've been listening, and listening, and listening, and they want to, particularly in the Art Department, they want to be doing. So, what does that have to do with my style? I still think it has everything to do with the issue of respecting and maintaining, you know, respecting them as individuals and trying to... So do you change the act? Well, that's an

interesting question. Is it time to bring out the food coloring and the water and hit the bricks again? It might be. It all goes in cycles.

**Are there any important events to occur that we haven't talked about?**

Coming up?

**No, that have occurred in the Art Department, in the College, important parts of the history we haven't mentioned?**

How many tapes can we use?

Who's gonna access this?

**Well, they're gonna be in an archive, there's an archive being created**

You could listen to them?

**In the library, potentially, yeah, yeah.**

Well, let me think about that for a while. Yeah, there's things that have happened (*laughs*). I mean, things always happen. Nothing that earthshaking. I'm building it up now: Oh boy, where are the bodies? You know? We haven't buried anybody alive in the basement or anything. No, there are not that many big scale things. Although I understand there's a juicy one going on now. It has the making of a real scandal. But in the Art Department, in terms of my tenure here, exciting events?

**Or important events?**

Important events? I think putting those tubes up in front of the building was an important event.

**The Sculpture Garden?**

The Sculpture Garden is a curious thing. That's the subject for another whole session. It's an ongoing work...

