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### Interview with Peter Thompson, 2001

Columbia College Chicago

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## P e t e r   T h o m p s o n

*Okay. It is June 20th, 2002, and this is an interview with Peter Thompson, full-time faculty member in the Photography Department at Columbia College.*

**And I'd like to start by asking you, when did you come to Columbia and what were the circumstances that brought you to the college?**

1977, California, working as a book designer and photographer and very, very interested in revolutionary technology, which at that time was copiers and fax machines. And there were very few of us actually at that time, working in that. And I had done some publishing, and the design of a traveling exhibition, and I had been doing, editing, a journal called *The Untitled Quarterly*, published by the Friends of Photography.

And probably all that combination, plus my being an artist-in-residence at the University of California at Santa Cruz, brought my name to the Photography Department. So I got a call and they said, "Would you like to start a Generative Systems Workshop?" And that was what we called it, at that time. There was this big name that the kids always—and faculty—always messed up. Students came to the registration tables and said they wanted to sign up for Generative Systems. So we lived through those days. And so I said, "Sure, I would love to." So I came here and was interviewed and offered the job.

**Tell us what Generative Systems was. Was that your term, was that the college's term?**

No, no. It was a term that had been started by Sonia Sheridan, at the

Art Institute of Chicago. And she was an evangelist for this type of technology. And by that, I mean, the technology itself was easily mastered. And so—and also gave you a sense of quick response, quick turnover and multiple iterations. So you could get significant feedback without having to apprentice yourself for a long period of time as you would in etching, for example, or view camera or other types of technologies.

And so, it was especially good for returning students—people with a lot of experience, a lot of life's experience, but without the skills to say it but they have the voice. And so what happened was—now I'm jumping forward to a particular type of students, and I'll come back in a second—but what happened was, is that I got a lot of returning women who precisely did that, that description. They are full of experiences, they've been managers, they've had kids to grow with. They have been without voice, many of them. They're desperate, they're hungry, they work like crazy, and they're fabulous. And so, those were the students that kind of spearheaded what actually happened in Generative Systems.

**Really?**

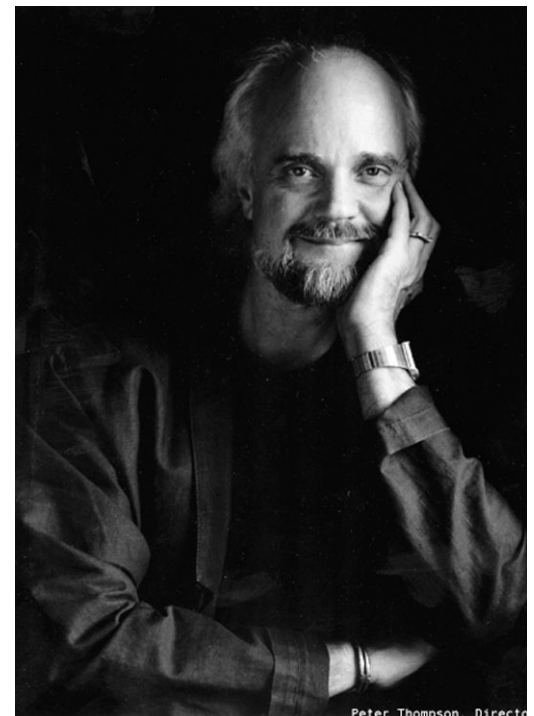
Yeah.

**That's interesting because, you know, a lot of people would talk about how few women there were in Columbia in relation to television or in that field of media. So that's an interesting aspect that I don't think has been really touched on.**

Yeah. Well, actually, Mike used to say that that's the "painted birds,"

as he called them—all wound up in Generative Systems. And these were the students that somehow didn't fit in other places, and it was more of an experimental attitude. And we taught 29 different techniques, ranging from book-making to photo-etching, and then copiers and so forth (*inaudible*). And it was this really marvelous, free-wheeling workshop. And the work tended to be very personal, because what you know and you're giving back is yourself and your own experiences. And that's (*inaudible*) also really beautifully the types of students we had, which tended to be educationally poor, but experientially rich. And without the ability to speak those experiences.

And so, consequently, at the end of, I think, the second year, we got invited to be part of the very first exhibition of Copier Art at the National Museum of Photography at the George Eastman House. So I went, and Mary went, and I brought the work of my students



Peter Thompson, Director

and gave a lecture at the George Eastman House, on the work of these students. So it was very personal stuff, it was really intensely powerful stuff. It was done in copiers and the book form and so forth. So I loved that process, and I loved those students.

Now, it seems to me in saying this, I've lopped off a part of your question. All of this part of the question that I did address.

**But in coming to Columbia, what—maybe you could talk about what you started to teach here. You talked about why they were attracted to you and how you found out about it. I guess the next question would be, had you heard of Columbia at all? Yeah.**

**You had?**  
Yeah.

**So what did you know about Columbia?**

I knew them via the posters for their lecture series—

**Oh, okay.**

—which were always very beautiful. And that was all I had heard. Then I had come here for business several years earlier, prior to teaching at the University of California, and I had met Lou, and we had talked about teaching here. And I said, “No.” Once he had described the students, I said, “No, I want to deal with really sharp, I want educated—I want to deal with elite students.”

Then I actually taught elite students at the University of California. And then I grew a little older and perhaps a little wiser, and I realized that those were not the students that I really—they're

doing fine things without me. But there's other types of students that I really felt strongly about. And at that point, it all came together as one unity), you know.

And, you know, as a child of the '60s, I never thought I could bond to an institution. But I bonded to Columbia. Never quite adjusted back to the institution and who it served and, you know, a tendency to all of it's all of our faults. But I'm very proud of this place.

**Maybe before we relive you coming here, can you tell us a little more about that transition, that change took place within your own, you know, goals or aspirations in regard to who you were going to teach, how did that change?**

Actually, I'll tell you first thing, I met my wife here at my first faculty meeting. Yes. And I'd been brought in, as I mentioned to you, and the very first faculty meeting, I was asked to stand up and say who I was and what I was doing. And I did that. And then there was a party afterwards. And at the party, this really lovely red-haired Irish woman came up to me and was—damaged Navy pea coat with missing buttons, with a kid on either side. She came up to me and said, “You son-of-a-bitch, you have my job.” And I thought that was really a great first line.

And it turns out that she was the chief graduate student at the Art Institute working with Sonia Sheridan and knew all the technologies, all the community, better than I did. And she had four children, had just got her MFA, and was teaching here part-time in the Art Department and had never been informed that there was this whole new arena, and too, that they had hired somebody for it. So at

this faculty meeting, this was her first announcement. But she, meanwhile, had just divorced, needed work, and would have been perfect for it. She was so pissed.

So I invited her out, and we went to 'The Artists' Café. And it turns out we were so earnest in those days, we started talking about “what should artists do, you know can save, you know?” And I just happened to have in my pocket, you see, I had this sheet of paper which is on mimeograph paper, which is, you know, the—

**With the purple lettering?**

Reproduction—exactly, and it gets on your hands. And I had my little—I had to address this question in all due diligence and earnestness. And it turns out she had it, although she didn't have it on her, but it was in her apartment, you know. And we just—we fell in love. And so, it just went from there.

**So you're here to stay then?**

I was pretty much—I was pretty much immediately integrated into Chicago and into Columbia. So she then was an artist-in-residence for the City of Chicago. And at the point, the city had the funds, which were federal funds, to do that, and they worked with schools and so forth. And she had also this intense feeling about working for that particular student population that I was just mentioning to you.

And she had studied about Interlochen, and the way that that was created and organized. And so she created, through the city bureaucracies, amazingly enough, an inter-city Interlochen for 150 poverty-level high school youth, five days a week at “Peer Group,”

right here at Navy Pier, and she called it “Peer Group.” And this was before Navy Pier was anything but this damage site. And she got it for free, and she had artists-in-residence in all the disciplines. So it was theater and video, at that time which was just coming out, and photography and dance and sculpture and comic book creation and, you know. And all the kids were patted down for knives in the beginning. And then she had a winter extension, and then back into the summer, and that lasted for some years. And it really, for her, it became this confluence between education, art—which has saved her life and got her out of a marriage—and counseling.

So now, jump ahead, she’s—after a number of years later, she is a psychoanalyst, and last February, was given a Lifetime Achievement Award by the Women’s Caucus for Art for her work as an analyst with an artist in the city of Chicago, which is really, really unusual that a shrink should be—I mean, that’s very unusual. So that was the first day, I met my wife here.

I have not forgotten what your question was. And I just fell into creating an environment that would be experimental and exciting, for myself and for the students that I began to know work here. The very first classes, for the first year that I taught, were all beginning Photo I, Darkroom I classes. And the very first class I had was a class with 18 black men. And I think my colleagues had laced the classes, my first classes, just sort of as an initiation ritual.

**As an initiation prank?**

Yeah. And I loved it. I love it. It felt like home to me.

**Well, maybe speak to the differences. Now, you said, you know, you decided that, you changed your mind about where your talents are best served, that the elite students were going to be fine on their own, that maybe you needed a different audience, different student population. Did you have expectations, were they met? And how was teaching different from University of California at Santa Cruz and coming here?**

You could not take anything for granted. I’ve had, in the first year, in the very first year of Generative Systems, which was year two of my being here, I had a student who could not read a ruler directly out of the Chicago Public High School system on the one hand, and on the other hand, in that same class, I had a graduate student from the Theological Seminary at the University of Chicago. So what it required was, was real juggling and a lot of individual tailorings and quick assessment of where people are and what they need to do, and a lot of pairing work, also.

And then what happened as the work—and that in conjunction with my sense that it’s easiest to bring all of this together if a young person is talking about what they know. And that’s for most artists, the very first important work they do is some type of a self-portrayal—not necessarily a self-portrait, but a self-portrayal. But if you can bring those things together and provide techniques to do that, sort of to form these things, that they’ll end up providing for themselves an environment of pure excellence. When you see one person really out on a limb, really having done a struggling work, and that just spurs them on. It doesn’t work in all cases, by any means.

However, I’ll tell you—I’ll jump forward because one of the questions you have down here is—what kinds of students do I work with? That very first year, in that very same class, I had a student who would fall asleep, who simply would fall asleep. And I taught him. This Spring, I ran into him some 26 years later. I remember his name, his name was Tommy. And we recognized each other in the stairwell. He had come back—he was now a demolition guy, you know.

**Yeah, construction type?**

Yeah. And he had been meaning to come back and see how Columbia had changed for years, and it had been on his mind. And so he was wandering through this place that has done numerous iterations since 1977 or ’78 when he was here. And we had a lovely chat, and he was talking about how much in retrospect he learned here, but he couldn’t—his life circumstances were such that none of it was able to be acted on. But he needed to come back, it was almost like a little pilgrimage for him. I was very touched by it.

And there were a number of people who were really quite unusual. In the very first class, that first year, rather, not the first class, I had a student, his name was Figgy. Wally Figowitz, was his name.

**That’s a great name.**

His is great. He drove a meat refrigeration truck. And he came to class wearing his jumpsuit—he was a big man—so he would always wear this blue jumpsuit with meat stains on it with hanging, fabulous, state-of-the-art cameras that he was always buying. And he was a kind of a loner, but sweet. And at that

point, the Time Life Company was just publishing a series of books on photography. And they had just published, within that series, a book on documentary photography. And I had bought it, and I brought it into class, and we were going through it, and Figgy stops and says, "That's me." And what he was pointing to was a photograph by David Douglas Duncan of Marines in Vietnam going through some, you know, hell hole. And then he proceeded to tell us about the fate of each of those people on the path. One guy had been skinned alive. And so he had—that was his second tour—he had somehow gotten in when he was 16. And everything he knew was connected with the military and with this intense loyalty and intense camaraderie. He had survived both tours. He now was driving a meat truck, came to class.

And other than that, he would go to the Playboy Building. At that point, they had a restaurant there on the 2nd floor, I think—the Playboy Club. And they had a little single table where the Bunnies would hold on reserve for Figgy, a single table with a single chair on it, and he had dinner there by himself every Friday night. And the Bunnies would all serve him and "How're you doin' Fig?" He then left. And over the years—before I say he left—he was always sort of at loose ends. In other words, being a hero back there was easy for him. Being a hero within the daily was really, really difficult. And you could see him struggling and struggling, but it was sort of like it was meaningless.

So cut to several years later, I start getting a series of postcards from him from various places in the

world, hotspots. And he had—he was hiring himself out as a—what would be the best term?—as a mercenary.

**Really?**

So I got them from the Congo, I got them from Rwanda, I got them from all kinds of places, just "Hi, how you doin'?" Thinking about you guys." Signed, "Your pal, Figgy." And then—and this would happen right here once a year or so until they no longer (*inaudible*), they no longer came. And I don't know what happened.

But that was another type of person we had, a person who would—in those years, we had a lot of guys from Vietnam. And they all had their stories, you know. And this place served as a place where they could begin to give voice to what it was to go to war, an experience. And Figgy was one example of that.

That's so interesting, because we have that National Vietnam Veteran's Art Museum, here in Chicago which, you know, is extraordinary to go in and see—

**I've never seen it.**

Oh, my students go every semester, and that is what they choose to write about in every final. But you would greatly appreciate it, because now you have experienced what the veteran is trying to express in some way or deal with or he, obviously, could not get out of that—or was most comfortable.

That was where he—you know, he loved people, and people loved him and they'd look after him. The Bunnies were looking after him on Friday nights. But, you know, other than that, what did he have? He didn't have much.

**Now, I would imagine you wouldn't be able to describe your students in the same way now.**

**How has the student—not the student population, but your students, how have they changed and has that affected how you teach or what you teach?**

Yeah. I became aware of a sea change in the early '90s.

**A what change?**

A sea change.

**What does that mean?**

It's a seafarer's term.

**Oh, okay.**

It has to do with a change in the tides.

**Okay.**

Suddenly, instead of going this way, it's going this way.

**Okay.**

In the early '90s, and I remember very clearly when it happened, and it was that I felt as if I were, when speaking in the class, that I were—I was—a monitor being watched. And when I look at a monitor, I don't have to acknowledge that it is a living being. It is simply there, it's inert, it's neutral, and something is coming out of it. And I became aware that, that was the type of facial expressions that I was experiencing as a teacher. And so I became—you know, in the sense of passivity was something that was increasingly to be dealt with, a certain entitlement, also. The sense of not having to work—or back up. In terms of the passivity and the sense of sitting back and wanting to simply look at the show.

**Because you're describing television and how you—**

Exactly, right. I started doing more collaborative work and pairing

people to do even more intense work and demanding through reports, for example, more active participation, along with the role, instead of just thinking about a project. And felt that these were techniques that I was really having to do, in an intense way, that I did not have to do for the first time I was here. It was a very interesting moment for me.

Now, as an extension of that, I began to see again in the '90s students coming through, as our age level dropped, we started seeing students who were simply along that time honored progression, kindergarten through college, never done anything else, never been outside, never been passed along, and were always expecting A's and B's simply for being there. "My attendance has been good. Why am I getting a C, D, or F?" And I started realizing, as many of us did, I think, that I was not—and I was grading too leniently. And that I wasn't right, and that I needed to give some kind of an accurate reflection of how, as professionals, we saw it.

And so I have since then, I grade on a curve. And I tell them up front on the first day, there will be people that get A's and there will be people that flunk. It's always the case, there will be D's. And a C is just that, it's average. And many of you will get C's. A minority will get B's, and a small minority will deserve A's because that's simply excellent work. Enrollment, attendance, I don't factor in unless (*inaudible*). It's not an issue that I grade on.

So those shifts have been in response to people coming up through the pipeline. And it feels to moving things—I can see with

my grandchildren, there's a sense of—all the schools I've been to have been schools that don't grade, for example, are pretty coddling as institutions, and I think that the parentals are closer now, is heavily on the side of coddling. Because if you really take a child and what you need to do and tie them to a structure just like they are devoid of awareness, somehow that something is not right. Did that parental culture, we all encountered that. It's a culture, also, where everything is under negotiation. Bad times are under negotiation, chores are under negotiation. There's not just, "Do it, this is it" theory (*inaudible*). "Do it and do that and do this." And when that happens, the drama level lowers and everyone sort of knows what's happening.

But I think all these factors are now present in the students that we're inheriting. And I see—and I just bet we're going to have more and more things to deal with.

**Would you say that you've brought more structure to your—you need more—**  
Yeah.

**And how do they respond to that? Is it working or are you finding that you're just swimming against the tide and they don't see it elsewhere?**

I would not go back and not do it. It works for some, it does not work for others. And the others for whom it does not work, aren't going to work anyway. And if we're here within the institution that educational opportunities and communications arts within a Liberal Arts context, that's been (*inaudible*). It's been very, very clear as opposed, for example, to Roosevelt University just up the street, where if you say Roosevelt,

you haven't a clue what the emphasis is. And they have been, consequently now, on the brink of going under for 20 years. They just now have a new president who is trying to get a focus in public policy, but it's too late. But it's sort of like Columbia vs. Roosevelt is similar to Neiman Marcus vs. Montgomery Ward in the sense that if you save Neiman Marcus, you know immediately that the really expensive, high-priced, quality merchandise, probably is clothes and so forth. But if you say Montgomery Ward, you don't know if you're talking about wrenches or women's dresses, you know. It's just this shamble of things.

Now having said that, and I'm still answering your question—I'm trying to move up towards answering it—having said that, I can tell you that an initiative that came out of the Liberal Arts Department this year seems to me to be the symbolic turning point away from our mission in that the Cultural Studies Program is going to be the very first, I feel, Arts Appreciation major that this college has ever, ever offered. I am—and I fought it very publicly, so I'm not saying anything here that I have not said stronger in public, and to Cheryl, by the way, whom I very much admire because we've had differences of opinion on this issue, that all the stated objectives of that major do not square. If you go, for example, to the parent organization of all the objectives listed under that major, which is the American Association of Museums, and you just do a job search for the kinds of economic endangered species that were listed in Cultural Studies, and you'll find that none of the people who will graduate with that major as of the Spring could get anything

else than a job as a tour guide in costume at a German fort. Everything else required specific training in the focus of the museum, lots of business skills. They don't give a shit about, you know, gender, equality, or about any of the other things. What they want to know is, "Do you have the software skills, do you have multiple languages?" In many cases, not just one foreign language, but oftentimes more than one. And they all required graduate students—every single one of these did.

And my worry is that the student comes into Columbia is going to come out with that major, not being able to get into any graduate program at all and will be ill-served by it. And I feel quite strongly about that. I feel that it's a symbolic turning-away from that major, plus what I'm really pissed about, also, is that when Carter came on as President, he talked about everything you do here, the goal, is to be first in the nation by the year 2000—five or six. But you just go up north to Northwestern University, they have six Cultural Studies Programs already in existence. Those people have impeccable credentials and publications, thanks very much, to support it, let alone the library.

And so if you take that goal and measure that against this new available sources, that doesn't square there, either. So I'm worried about the future of this institution. I'm worried that it's going to go from a Neiman Marcus to a Montgomery Ward, which affects all of us. And what happens is, what has happened—and this has to do also with how this institution has changed—what has happened is

that as we've expressed remediation more and more, the whole Liberal Arts faculty—if we want to split this institution into two academic communities, which they actually are. There's a Liberal Arts—and I'm using Liberal Arts in this big sense—on the one hand, and the Communications Arts on the other hand. They have two different functions, and they have two different types of faculty, and they have two different academic cultures. As we move more and more into remediation, the Liberal Arts factor has significantly moved up more and more. And as the original people who founded the place, the old farts like me, as we're getting older, we're retiring and so forth. And the new people who've been hired have been hired in this tier over here, the Liberal Arts. They tend to come from institutions where they have been from kindergarten through graduate school without ever having left. Maybe one or two other institutions at most before they get here, and they tend to arrive here generally as a first career, and they're used to an institution looking a certain way which makes perfect sense. Why should they not have Liberal Arts degrees? Why should they not have Liberal Arts majors, history or whatever? And it doesn't look like what they're used to here. And they don't know the history of what has made this place a success and why it does continue to grow while every other institution in the area that's a Liberal Arts focus has gone down in the '80s and '90s except this institution. But they don't know that history, nor should they really when they come in. But people like me, I think it failed them in letting them know what the history is and why it is we've been successful, and what I think we should be really careful about changing. So I feel

badly about that. I'm not sure what—but I can tell you, also, the people that are being retired, we've really put so much of our hearts in this place, and it is so difficult just in terms of time and management that part of it is that we purchased the place. I think what's happening is that the oldsters are no longer—after this big accreditation push, and this big huge indenture of governments, where you actually have a huge superstructure that demands a lot more people than we have to fill it, that those two things together after the accreditation made the consumer people pull out. So I don't see people like Jeffrey anymore. I mean, Chap used to be very, very, very, physical. And I think he's just doing other things, maybe he's turning a little bit more inward, perhaps he's doing his own work for the first time. But we're not all defining these places as our work anymore.

So what's happened is we've advocated and said we're friends. And the new people coming in, and they're turning it into a new type of institution. And I think it's a very understandable, but really important sea change, and I don't think the institution is going to recover from it. I don't see—I have worries about it. And I really object to the Cultural Studies major. And I have to tell you, also, that my graduate work is all—not all—but is in Comparative Literature. At the University of California, I was in the doctorate program before Vietnam started.

**But you're saying, don't come here if that's what you want?** Exactly, and I'm saying that my critique right now comes out of the mouth of a person whose primary graduate work is in Liberal Arts.

But I'm really clear about what this institution does and what it should—how its focus should be. I may be wrong, but I'm clear, you know? So I'm concerned about it, and I'm concerned that—I'm concerned that—I don't know why Carter has announced this goal and then has abdicated, pulled back from it.

**Well, it sounds great, for one reason.**

Yeah?

**Yeah, it sounds great.**

The goal?

**Yeah.**

Yeah. Well, it's bullshit. I would go just on the basis of this one—the passing of this one major. How would we have a Cultural Studies major that's nationally a leader in three years? I mean, what kind of fraud is this? And it is fraud.

**But at the same time, you're saying that in these other fields, that it is possible?**

Yeah. Our Photography Department is probably the preeminent program in the United States. We have six Guggenheim Fellows, a Rockefeller Fellow, and I would bet you we have two more Guggenheims in the next three to five years. Tell me any other faculty that's done that in the United States? Can't compare with us. And we've been really attentive to this from the get-go. And now there's other—you know.

So I'm really proud of this faculty, I'm proud to be a member of it.

And I'm proud to be a member of the film faculty. I mean, it's now the largest film school in the world, and probably the most equipment-rich school in the world. And that

coming from an institution without a big endowment, that's tuition-driven, is amazing to me.

**We talked about needing to address that. Why don't we talk about your work and teaching the Film Department, in addition to full-time faculty in the Photography Department. And also, if you could address your work and how teaching at Columbia has influenced your work and vice versa, how your work has influenced your teaching. I know that's a mouthful. What was the first part? Would you say it again? I'm still living five minutes ago. Okay, here it is.**

**Now, put Cultural Studies aside—**Okay, okay.

**Your work with the Film Department and that you really—you said you teach half of your classes in Film. So let's talk about that, and then also talk about your professional work and its relation to your teaching.**

Well, I did a film for the first time—well, actually, I'll back up. I started out as a musician, as a classical musician and had gone to Europe to study as a young man and concertized in Europe until I realized I was a third-class musician. But I still loved it, I had learned (*inaudible*) about it. But then I'd also picked up languages and so forth. So I ended up five institutions later going to the University of California and in a doctorate program in Comparative Literature.

And then cut to military, I'm in there as a photojournalist, never having had any interest in photography, never owning a camera, but having taken the test, which was the very first test that was available

for me to take prior to going to active duty so that I could be rated and not just sent across to Vietnam as cannon fodder. So I passed the test, and so suddenly I'm a rated photojournalist. I'm on a plane—

**Was it a test, and they told you you're going to—did it—was it aptitude, was it—**

No, no, no—it was an actual test to be a Third-Class Petty Officer as a photojournalist.

**Oh, really?**

Yeah. And so I got the manual, I just memorized the manual, and passed the test. But I had, you know, had some compelling reason to do that, which was I didn't want to go that direction.

So the next thing I knew, once I passed, I was rated as a photojournalist and I'm on a plane and I'm going to the Middle East. I end up in Italy, and on the flagship in the Sixth Fleet, and the personal French and Italian interpreter for the Captain of the Sixth Fleet and a photojournalist.

So I then began to be just taken over by photography, I adored it, it was just such a wonder. And when I got out, I decided that I wanted to go study with the best. And so I wound up in California, went to California, and knocked on the door of Ansell Adams. And I ended up beginning as a volunteer, and then they hired me to work with an organization called The Friends of Photography, which at that time, there were two great exhibition arenas of photography in the world, actually. One was east coast, and the other was Advanced Photography on the West Coast. So I ended up being there, and I ended up being the executive director.



And then from there, I left and did book design and photography and with teaching gigs around. The last one of which was at the University of California, and from there, I came here.

So, this is always going someplace, I promise. So—

**I'm with ya.**

Okay. So I had music, I had literature, I had photography, I had these other things. And what I found in Generative Systems was that that was an arena where these can start to move from individual entities and come together. Where I really found that I could do that was in film. And so I made my first film in 1981 and it won at Festival, much to my surprise. And I suddenly found myself needing to learn about film, never having done any.

So I went back to school here and just did retraining with formal interest and going to class. And then, I was doing documentary films. And then I got the first of two Rockefeller's in Intercultural Documentary Film, was what it was called, in '91.

So suddenly, I was in the position of being a student, as I felt, a student filmmaker who was just constantly sort of scrabbling to catch up, to learn the technology and just to learn stuff, but doing my work as a photographer in film. As I say, many of my films are built around still photographs. And so I started teaching in that department in about '87, '88, and they've been very, very kind to me. Actually, I ended up being the coordinator for the producing curriculum within the Video Department as a member of the Photography Department. It's all very mixed up and fabulous,

but it had this incredible sense of freedom. My chair, John Mulvany, was superb for me—that is to say, anything that I initiated, he knew that I would do, and so he would simply, he would say, five. If it's going to make you happy, I want to make you happy, and you can bring what you learn there back to our students, and we'll all benefit. And I'm very, very grateful for that.

So I've tried a number of things here. I've team taught Image and Story, Editing and Narrative II, Idea Production Workshop, Editing the Documentary—did a number of courses. And what I teach now is Editing the Documentary, and I'm really focusing in on that. And so I started—not started—but I remade that class, and then I have several sections of it, and I coordinate those sections off my website. So does that answer all right? Okay.

**And then maybe also you could speak to some of the work that you have done. And has teaching at Columbia influenced that? Have your students influenced your work, or again, when you bring things back to the classroom, has that changed? Are you a different photographer for being a filmmaker?**

Well, here's one way I'll talk about it. For a two-and-a-half year period—I was asked in '95 or '96, I think it was to be the Associate Academic Dean for Technology here. And I did that, I said, "I will do it for at least two years to move a number of initiatives ahead." And I didn't do it more, because I have done two things: I've done the initiatives, and I could see that the whole world was changing digitally. And if I ever intended to keep on with an artist, then I best get

out fast so I could begin the process of retraining.

So what I find is—so I did that. I went back and I started—I took Visual Imaging one year and I eventually taught it. And now I'm certified Adobe—they call it Adobe Certified Expert with Photoshop, much to my amazement, because I'm always knocked out by how much I still don't know. But what I'm finding is, is that the technology itself is the driving force in actually keeping me awake during work. That the amount of retraining, the continual updating, is such that I literally have not done work in quite awhile. Now, I'm completing a film, a film has been completed—I have completed a film—a feature documentary, it's 90 minutes long. It's about three generations of a Mayan family shot over a ten-year period. So that just has been completed now. But it seems to me that that will keep me on some ongoing—and meanwhile, I'm scrambling around, as really my front-burner issues to try to keep up with the changing technology so that I can incorporate them into one, my work and number two, teach my students.

**Okay, my question is then, will it ever slow down, and will you ever be—**

Oh, of course not. So I'm really worried about it.

**I mean, Columbia, obviously, has been a great resource for you, you know, being here, but it sounds like because it's available and you can keep improving, that keeps you from the work.**

Well, you know, I just got a Titanium G4, with a gig of memory, and 60 gigs hard drive. And it's this little laptop. And last

weekend, my grandson and I took my whole offline video editing digital system, which is comprised of three different monitors, hard drives, external, all the stuff, we took it all down and put it in a crate and took it down to the basement, and I hope to sell it on E-Bay. And it's replaced now with a flat-screen panel and a single Titanium laptop. And that was pretty graphic for me just to see this huge shift, just within my own studio.

So no, it will not change. I mean, one of the things that was shocking we talked about years ago was the autonomy technique. It has its own momentum, it's independent of us, and it will lead us and drive us and chew us up. And that has lots of ramifications. It used to be in the old days, we would have a space, some drawing tables, some square rules and a teacher. And that, you know, has a high profit to expense ratio. And now, everything has been shifted. And we've bought into it, there's no getting around it. If you don't keep up with the software upgrades, it means that the students cannot buy the books that support that software anymore, it's not published. So that's not an option, either.

So I just feel like I'm one person from us all. We're all doing it in various ways, but I will go back to the two basics. It weighs a lot more upon the Communications Arts faculty, I would think, in general, than does those faculties who use this as a peripheral issue. So what I'm seeing also is that this faculty here is getting more and more tired and are not involving themselves in the governments as much anymore. This faculty has the time now,

comparatively more than this one. And they are entering positions in governments, and they are—as is their absolute right—they're changing the direction of their focus of Columbia College.

**I want to make sure that we get to one of the topics that we talked about before, that you were going to describe the artists and apprenticeship program and talk about its purpose and why it was eliminated and your feelings about that.**

Oh, okay. Mary had just finished the Peer Group Program.

**Oh, okay, okay.**

She was still doing the Peer Group Program. And Mike Alexandroff found out about it. And she came in and told him what she was doing, and Mike felt that that kind of thing could be transferred into working with some of our more "at-risk" students. And he, therefore, along with Lya Rosenblum, supported this new program that she created called Artists in Apprenticeship. And it's created sort of a home room feel where a group of students were brought together, they tended to be people who were first years at-risk or people who self-described as at-risk, and those were people who were also a lot of voiceless women, for example, who just needed what they thought to be more support.

So this really interesting mix of people that—some that others want to get rid of, on the one hand, and on the other hand, people who were just the cream of the crop and wanted to get more of this supportive environment. And it tried intensely—it married the Liberal Arts Studies that they were studying, the concerns and issues of that,

with their own personal work. So it had a lot of one-on-one counseling as a part of it.

And what happened was that in spite of everybody's predictions, it not only survived, but succeeded beyond anybody's predictions. At that point, we were doing it like about—I don't remember what the Fall to Spring retention rate was, but it wasn't terrific. But they did a federal—they had federal—since it was supported by federal monies, they had federal—what do you call it?—it'll come to me in a minute—evaluators. We had federal evaluators come in, three of them. And at the end of the evaluation, the head evaluator was trying to enroll his son in the program. And at that point, they were having a 91% Fall to Spring retention rate. Unheard of in this institution, for or since. And especially with those types of at-risk students.

And when the Title III funding—I think it was Title III—was cut, the administration cut the program. And they use it as an excuse that they could not be—that they did not have Mary Doherty cloned to be able to enlarge this program, because it should be a requirement, so it should be mandatory. And on that last issue alone, Mary said "We can't do it, it has to be with the full assent of the student. We cannot mandate the student to do it. It has to be their decision and be fully supported by the staff there," which would include a lot of the personal counseling. So the program was cut. There was a lot of, at that time, a lot of dissatisfaction around that expressed vocally.

