

Interviewee: Bernard Malek
Interviewer: Mary Emma Harris
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**[BEGINNING OF TRANSCRIPT
TAPE 1, SIDE 1]**

BM: Which is [UNINTEL WORD] the past. One of the things that kind of turned me off about this interview was the idea of talking about the past. I always refer to the present, not even to the future. But to the present. This is —well, how shall we say it? This is the way I think. This kind of thing is accurate in metaphysics, physics, the present-day thinking, and it's very rewarding, and it productive. So when we talk about the past, I prefer to think of whatever we refer to as the past, as being something that is happening right now, which is different. In which case the position that an interviewer takes with the person they're interviewing is slightly different. I say to you, "Tell me something about Black Mountain," and that takes it out of "I remember when and this and such a thing happened. So, okay. Go ahead. Tell me about —

MEH: You live in Yonkers.

BM: I live in Yonkers

MEH: But you were from the Bronx. You grew up in the Bronx.

BM: No. I was born in Yonkers. Let's see. I was born in Yonkers, moved to Bronxville, which is the beginning of this saga of Black Mountain. That's where it started. You can blame it all on Bronxville. I went from Bronxville to Black

Mountain and into the Army. From the Army came back briefly to Yonkers. Got married, lived in New York, then moved to Los Angeles, and from Los Angeles came here temporarily, have stayed here for a very long time, and now am closing or developing this phase into another one which will be a multiple-base one and probably the most interesting part of the whole history.

MEH: So, how did you hear about Black Mountain College? You were blaming Bronxville.

BM: I was kidnapped in a sense. I was kidnapped.

MEH: How?

BM: Well, let's see. How shall we put it? I was a special case. You know about the Bronxville schools, don't you?

MEH: Which —?

BM: Progressive education. John Dewey, you know, all that kind of stuff.

MEH: Fieldston? Was Fieldston —?

BM: No, Fieldston school is a private school. The Bronxville public schools are —

MEH: The public school.

BM: The public school is one of the first Progressive Education public schools in the country. They were very close to — what was that place in Evanston, Illinois where there was also a progressive school? But, anyhow, it's part of the John Dewey concept of education, so it's no wonder that I went from — to Black Mountain because there's a connection between Black Mountain's idea of education and Bronxville. How did I get there? Well, I'll tell you. I was an exceptional student with many, many things given to me that were to a

privileged person because of being a very gifted person artistically, intellectually, academically. Well, Progressive Education sort of treads water and lets you go on. I never really completed by courses, and it was an understanding between myself and the teachers that it would be taken care of. Probably irregular. Interesting experimentally. Rather detrimental to a career life, sort of life, you know. I was not prepared for anything. I was not prepared for college. I was not prepared for Black Mountain really or anything. I was just — at a certain point right then and now. That kind of thing. And from there I was free to be ejected or projected into whatever life came up with at that time or the circumstances. Let's put it that way. So one day I hear from Miss Penny [PH] — Edith M. Penny [PH] — what is she? The principal of the school — that two men had come in looking for candidates for a place called Black Mountain College. [LAUGHTER] I'd never met these guys, and she said, "I told them that you were the perfect student for that place there. You and one other person. A girl named Frances Kuntz." Is that name familiar to you?

MEH: I was going to ask you about her.

BM: Oh, I'll tell you as much as I can.

MEH: Is she still living?

BM: No. About two years ago she died. She's now inhabiting the Brooklyn Botanical Gardens as dust. So, Frances also being an exceptional student and a special person was a candidate for Black Mountain. They never interviewed us. They never talked to us. That's why I say we were kidnapped. Now, there was a big fight over this thing between the teacher — the dramatics teacher who

recognized my extraordinary talent and the other group — the academics.

Academic, my foot. I mean, how does that term fit in with Black Mountain? Very unacademic, actually. Well, anyway, so what happened was — well, I don't know. I finally said, "Yes." I don't want to go to dramatic school. I want to go to Black Mountain. And Frances went down there, checked the place out, came back with a glowing report of the most wonderful place in North Carolina and the most wonderful people and you must come. I said, "Fine. Okay." They gave me a scholarship. My parents were able to fund a certain part of it, and that was it. And come the fall, I was down there.

MEH: Do you recall how you physically went down to Black Mountain the first time?

BM: Physically. Bus. Greyhound bus. I was met at the bus, at the terminal down there. I'm ready really to slam into the thing. I know we're right at the hot beginning.

MEH: Why do you describe it as the "hot beginning"?

BM: Well, now we get personal. You see, and this is a kind of thing that somebody might want to cut off — I don't see any reason for it at this late date. I got into a — was met by a member of the faculty, and how can I —? Anyway, we're driving, and this guy has his hand on my knees. And I know he's making a pass at me. And I froze. That was my introduction to Black Mountain College. Then I went upstairs — up those stairs at the place there and met other people, and again there were other elements there, all sexual. The atmosphere in 1939, I guess it was, at Black Mountain College was very — was hypersexual. And, how old was I? I guess I was 18 or 19. I was receptive to this. To all the

currents of it. And they had a very strong and marked influence on me personally and also in terms of being a student because I was swept up into a kind of emotional condition that had nothing to do with learning or anything to do with academics.

MEH: So, how did you respond to this?

BM: With agony and suffering. It was terrible. There were times when I thought I would go out of my mind. On the one hand —

MEH: You couldn't cope with it. You weren't sure —

BM: No, I was in a formative stage. See, now, things are really tumbling out. You don't know which comes first or how to fit the pieces together. But there were — luckily Frances was there. I think Frances — Frances and I married later. As I think you know. You might —

MEH: I didn't know.

BM: Frances Kuntz and I, yes, married and she was there. And I think otherwise I would have run away from the place or blown my brains out. But there were times that were very suicidal. It was terrible because, the one hand, it's supposed to be one thing, and, on the other hand, it turns out to be something else. And it was a very ambiguous thing in every respect. Now, Mary Emma, I want to say this one thing here. Thinking about Black Mountain and trying to be as objective about it as possible — and reading your article which was in connection with the exhibition at Bard. Was it Bard? It occurred to me that Black Mountain — this is not dodging, but it's sort of trying to fit things in into categories or possibly a shape of some kind — Black Mountain College actually

breaks down into phases. See if you agree with me. One was the beginning phase or formation phase. The second one was pre-World War II. Then there was the World War II phase. And then there was the other one. I think there was one more, the closing phase. One of them produced, allowed for development of the real talent that was there all the time, but was impeded by different considerations. So actually when I read about the objective, or the question, are the problem, that was formulated by the staff, the people, the teaching community. How do we teach people to think? That was an academic question that could never be examined in actual practice at the time that I was there.

MEH: So, we'll come back to this. Did you have any idea what you wanted to study?

BM: No. No. But because I had experience in theater, I was more or less pushed into that direction and interestingly enough — let's have some coffee, okay?

[BREAK IN TAPING]

MEH: Bob Wunsch was teaching?

BM: Uh-hm. So to speak. I'll tell you. Let's put it this way. Thinking about it again last night. I don't think there was one person there who was really a qualified teacher at this time.

MEH: How did Bob Wunsch conduct theater activities?

BM: An amateur could have done better. The idea, the theory was that you're going to find yourself through drama. Bunk. It never worked. It's only a theory, but it never worked in practice. How could it? This is the interesting part of Black

Mountain as one thinks about it in retrospect — that there's a big gap between theory and practice.

MEH: Did you take part in any drama productions?

BM: Oh, that's all I did. I did nothing else.

MEH: What productions do you recall?

BM: *John Gabriel Borkman*. That was the first one.

MEH: What role did you play?

BM: The kid who wants to live, live, live. Who is that? That's not *Borkman*. That's *Hedda Gabler*, I think. The son, anyway, it was laughable because it was pure ham. But Bob was not a technician. He had — he wasn't teaching drama, and here I am a candidate for a career in theater suddenly transplanted into an entirely different situation. So you can see where the confusion would take place. The summer before I was working with professionals at the Dennis Theater on Cape Cod. And there it was theater. You learned your lines. You did this. You did not do that. It was technique, you know. And here without any preparation I'm suddenly exposed to something that is not only dealing with technique — is not dealing with technique. It is taking what I have to offer as an experienced actor, my experience — I got medals at Bronxville, by the way, and all sorts of recognition. It just — I was a very special person — into using this in a different way. In other words, they said, "Ah-ha. Here's a candidate. Let's work on him." Not consciously but that's the way it turned out. And Bob Wunsch was not a director. I don't know of anything he ever said or did that was of any use. Scenically it was probably the fact that they did productions that used

frames that were empty of any pictures. Interesting today as I look back at it. A frame with no picture. It's an interesting metaphor, isn't it, for Black Mountain at that time. A frame without a picture.

MEH: When you say that there was a tremendous difference between theory and practice, what did you perceive as "theory" and how does the "practice" not measure up?

BM: I'll tell you right off the bat. I had an experience — let's start with experience. Are you familiar with the lobby at that —

MEH: Lee Hall.

BM: — up on the hillside. The Baptist building.

MEH: The YMCA.

BM: Right. Right. Right. I was standing at the window looking out over the valley, and there was a fire on the other side of the valley. A trail of smoke going up as I stood there. And standing beside me was another student — Jerry Wolpert. I was entirely in my own thoughts — wrapped up in my own thoughts — and suddenly I smiled. Had nothing to do with anything around me. I had my own private thoughts. Jerry swings around at me and says, "What are you laughing at?" in his ugly, surly way. "I'm going to smash you in the mouth." And that attitude had support from quite a number of people there, some of the most intellectually brilliant people. To answer your question — the difference between theory and practice. The theory of progressive thought, liberal or radical, I know — I don't believe, I know this. We all know is humanity. The inhumanity of Black Mountain at that time was completely at odds with the stated ideal. I knew that

these were progressive people. I knew that they were extremely well-educated people with a good background. Some were — they all were very bright intellectuals, but they were cruel people and that cruelty came out in very interesting ways. Number one, I'm really ramming things together here, but let it come. Number one, in the formation of cliques. The caste system. And it was vicious. If you were not one of them, you were out, and they made sure you were out in deadly ways. You were excluded from everything. You were made to feel as if you were absolutely nothing. You were not worthy of the air around you or even to look at the valley and think your private thoughts. Cruelty beyond belief.

MEH: Who were the people who were considered the upper caste?

BM: I forget the names. Yes. It's important. It's important. At the very top — we'll start with the faculty, right. Ted Dreier and Bobbie Dreier. Urbane, sophisticated, well-groomed people. Bitches. Cruel. Absolutely cruel and selective, and they never let up on that. If you did not fit in with their social scheme, you never got invited to their parties. There was a party every single Saturday. You never came. There were not that many people. If they were really part of the objective, the stated objective of Black Mountain, they would have — it seemed to me — it seems to me now, they would have made an effort to at least invite you once to a party. No, they did not. They had with them Don Page, Bill Reed, the Albers. And I don't think even the Jalowetzes fit into that scheme, interestingly enough. Stix was there, too. Stix was also part of that group. And then you had different kinds of groups forming. The really — the painful thing

about it was that everybody knew where they belonged in a short time. And do you know how that worked? You must have — you must have heard about the dining room arrangement.

MEH: Tell me.

BM: There were round tables. And one of a certain clique or caste. Cliques were everywhere, you know. But of the caste system at Black Mountain would come in, claim a table, turn the chairs up, and nobody else was allowed to sit at that table. Therefore at the corner there, closest to the kitchen, was Dreier, Bill Reed — Alex Reed — whoever. And the Albers. Then you'd have somebody — over here you'd have Jerry Wolpert, Sue Spayth, and a few others. Over here you'd have — I have all the names down here. Two others. And then over here and there finally in would trickle the outcasts of which I was one.

MEH: Who were the other outcasts?

BM: Frances was one. Jean Jordan was another one. Avis Belt, Anne Furnas. Who else? And people who really were happy-go-lucky and didn't care. There was Elledge in 1939, I guess. Windholz. And then there was Jimmie Jamieson and his girlfriend — a really nice girl that I saw quite a bit of later. They had another table. But this system of exclusion lasted all the time I was there. Even in the summer during work camp. Someone would quickly go and, grab a table, turn the chairs up. You dare not sit there. Pretty rough stuff.

MEH: Why do you think you were excluded? Why did you feel excluded? What do you think were the criteria for excluding people?

BM: It just occurred to me this morning, thinking about — looking forward to our — They pegged people in a certain way. The elite. I was known as the dilettante.

MEH: Why was that?

BM: Because I didn't fasten on any one thing. And I was not part of the academic community. I was not. I did not attend classes. I had no idea what to attend. Or if I did go — I'll tell you about that later — what was going on was, I wasn't prepared for that. I was a creative person who was best in the imaginative world of theater or painting or sculpting. This I'd been doing since childhood. And on the basis of this I was admitted into Black Mountain. The first interview was Dr. Straus, who was my advisor. Oh, I can tell you something — oh, I'll not stop because nobody will give you some of the stuff that I'll give you here.

MEH: What —?

BM: Let me tell you about this here. This first interview with him as an advisor and as a — my advisee, whatever. He says, "Well, Bernard, when we got your application, we looked at it and said, said, "Well, a genius." Pause. "And now," and then he made a move, meaning "no genius." Nothing. The second interview which was I think six months later, Dr. Straus says, "Well, I guess you are making progress. I notice that when you come to my class you stay awake." No leadership. No understanding of the nature of the need. So I say, "Were these really teachers? No." They were people on some kind of personal trip who had the ability to express themselves, to talk with people on a certain level, and if you are not on that level — I remember sitting in the — you were out. Simply out. There was no way of being brought in. Dr. Straus's class — I picked

on this — I had no idea what does psychology mean. The term itself that nothing to me. What is philosophy? But I remember today the discussion off Kant, Ishtar. I remember the names. What do they mean? What was this all about? I couldn't find out. Frances and I used to sit in her study and try to dope this thing out. What the hell are they talking about? And then we being imaginative, creative people starting to come up with jokes of our own to try to hold onto sanity in a way. So our question was to the community, "Who said two and two is four? Why should it not be five? An interesting approach to things. We never got the answer to that because we never had the chance to ask. We were out. Always out. Oh, the other — the outs — Jean Jordan, Frances and myself — we were really at the bottom of the barrel there. In a way — and this is another part that's interesting — there were other people there who were not acceptable. They disappeared. They either left on their own or they were told not to come back.

MEH: Windholz.

BM: Windholz. There were a couple of twins from California. Girls who had been to the University of Hawaii. I remember them. They were not outstanding people in any way, but they were nice people, and they must've come to Black Mountain for a good reason after being at the University of Hawaii and not fitting in there. But they weren't allowed to stay. They were squeezed out. Socially they were pariahs. Intellectually they could that possibly fit in. There was no way of bringing them in. I'm really going to jump the whole thing quite a bit here which has given me an idea. Let's see if I can pull this together now.

Too much emphasis and the thought flies out. Now let's get that — we'll come to that later. It will come back. Very important thought. Yes. Why —? This brings us to the letters from Bob Wunsch. The questioning, the soul-searching [UNINTELLI WORD] toward the end. Why did Black Mountain fail? Black Mountain failed — and I'll tell you this because I sure this is the reason — the same reason that radical movements fail everywhere. They do. There's a certain progression that works, and it works also under the influence of radical thought as well as liberal. There's no real separation. But why is it that specific movements don't form a leadership that can be recognized and can be addressed at times? For the simple reason — let's go back to Black Mountain. Black Mountain was so choice, so authoritarian they could not tolerate middle quality or low quality. As a result, it seems to me, they had a group that was strictly top and with no one to lead and no one to set an example for, they could not run the place. And eventually they turned it on themselves. The pyramid reversed and it falls. It's as simple as that. Brilliant self-destroyed.

MEH: Did you feel that the people when you were there that were there were really brilliant people?

BM: I knew that they were very capable people intellectually. What is brilliance at that time is not necessarily brilliance at this time. I thought that they — and I know now that they were very narrow-minded people. But I've encountered this kind of thing before amongst people of that political persuasion and not before but since. Since. For some crazy reason my experience has been channeled towards radical associations. Not by choice. It's just by coincidence. In the

theater I had the same experience. And it was interesting to talk to people after the McCarthy experience. It was very bitter about associates not supporting them, not helping the people who needed jobs, people who needed support. Who could get jobs, who could get support from the people who were in an employing position but did not choose to give it to certain people because of political [?] thoughts. That's an interesting story. That's a big, a very dramatic phase of my life that has to be talked about someday because I suppose you might say that's a phase of Black Mountain as well. It has to be because it follows its steps along the same path, you know. So it is of interest. It's not irrelevant and so I — so anyway.

MEH: In the three years you are at Black Mountain, did you don't feel you had any teacher you felt was competent or a good teacher?

BM: Mary Emma, I never went to class.

MEH: [OVERTALK]

BM: let me say — did go. I went to some classes. I'll tell you about them. The only classes I remember I went to were Dr. Straus's philosophy, psychology. Ken Kurtz. I had no idea what the hell he was talking about. And it was a joke because I would go from gym with Bela Martin to Kurtz's class. There was placed next to a couch on the floor and within five minutes I was on the floor snoring, asleep. And Ken Kurtz did not stop it, didn't not mean anything to him. And he went on —

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2]

BM: So we have Kurtz. We have Dr. Straus. That was up at the Baptist center.

MEH: Did you take any music?

BM: Oh, yes. Did I take any music? Again, an example of the quality of teaching. I took violin, voice, piano. It sounds pretty good, doesn't it? Well, let me give you a description first of all of — The best of it was Trudi Straus. She was a kind person, and with her I did make some progress on the violin. The apotheosis [?] of this whole experience here. She was a good, truly a good person, and a warm being and a friend. I must come back to the Strauses is later. Voice was Johanna Jalowetz who couldn't teach her way out of a paper bag. She did nothing more than to destroy what potential I had. Piano lessons with John Evarts, the knee warmer, were grim. John's idea was to give you an assignment, and then you play it through for him on your meeting day. And if he didn't like what you're doing — no, I'm generalizing. No, no. Specifically, I remember this and this turned me off so I quit John. He would very rudely take and knock your hands off the keyboard. "No, no, no, no, no. This way. This way." And then he would he would play it through, but you don't remember the lesson. You don't remember anything except that you were struck, physically hit, by this uptight guy with his own private mission in life. His extracurricular instincts. John never followed up on an initial pass. That needs to be said. There were no homosexual overtures made by anyone. The personality. The apotheosis [?] of this whole experience here. The apotheosis [?] of this whole experience here — the homosexual personality — was very, very distinct at Black Mountain at that time in '39. Again the names. Bill Reed was thrown out of Harvard, I understand, because of some involvement there. Did you know

that? Well, that's one of the deep, dark secrets. He was. He was kicked out. So, Bill Reed was on the defensive all the time, but he was a very attractive homosexual, and he was the first guy that I met there. He was a role model for me because I had not seen or met anybody who was this warm, such a nice guy and so talented. The wonderful things that he did. His marvelous study was a standard that I could look up to. So I, and that formative period, related to him on that level, of same gender level. Don page was also part of that clique. Ah, let's see. Then there was John Stix, the biggest hypocrite of them all. George Randall, a very effeminate guy. They all got away with it. Who else? John Evarts, certainly.

MEH: Got away with what?

BM: With being what they were, but at the same time pretending to be something else. Playing a role which put other people on the defensive. In other words, there wasn't the kind of honesty that there is now in the sexual scene. There was a lot of deception there. The thing about Black Mountain at that time was that everybody had to team up. You had to have a sex partner. And this was the big joke of the thing because part of group pressure was weekends when all the studies would be closed. There would be a "do not disturb" sign on it. And, you know, people were screwing behind the signs there. And somebody on the staff was always checking up to see who was sleeping with whom. But if you did not do that, then there was another group that was the same gender crowd, that was — who lived another kind of life, you know. It was— I was dragged into that. I was a part of it. But again, as I say, there was no development. There

was no openness. There was a common knowledge of it. And that again put certain people on the defensive and at a disadvantage obviously. At a disadvantage. Bill Reed could never be put at a disadvantage because he had the support of the very top of the caste system. Don Page, whatever his proclivities were, managed to hide his true self, whatever that was. Randolph — George Randolph? Randall. George Randall, yeah, had the front of Lisa Jalowetz along with John Stix. John Stix, he shall be nameless. I mean], this is beyond the pale as far as my [UNINTELLI WORD]. John was also a very petty person. A very privileged person because his parents came from St. Louis. They were very rich. Mama would come there in her big car, and everybody knew that she was in residence. The food would flow, the privileges would flow. John had the biggest car there. John could do whatever he wanted. What his experience was in this area I don't know, but he had an easy social life. He was never driven to the edge. And so on and so forth. You know you talk about emotional maturity, objectives of an ideal community. It didn't have a chance to develop in a normal way. And this went on for three years. Why they didn't get rid of me, I don't know, except that somehow my talent was coming through plus the fact that the war came along, and I was a candidate for the Army. And I did. I went into the Army and that might've been a factor which kept them from — you know, they couldn't throw me out.

MEH: Why did you stay for three years if you were so unhappy?

BM: Because I had no other place to go. I didn't know. I had found a place — as painful as it was, it was still some place I could hold onto. I was a very insecure

person. If I went from there, where would I go? The people that wanted to send me to the Royal Academy in London had given up on me. And there I was, hanging on by my teeth, on the edge of a cliff. I couldn't possibly leave. I didn't know where to go. So, with no place to go and nothing to do, it was quite an extraordinary vacuum that I was living in it that. And it's amazing that I did survive. The payoff of the whole thing I think was the final production in the dramatics department. Oh, before we come to that — what other class that I take? Finally, after three years I think I took a class with Bob Babcock, European history. But by this time learning was not a serious thing with me. I went to that class because I had to have something to show for the time I put there. Along with Frances. Frances Kuntz. She was also in the class, we presented — we worked up a presentation for a report on the history of Russia in the 19th century. We came to class. "Well, Bernard is finally going to give us a report after three years." I took out the paper. Set it before me but not before reaching into — under my shirt and pulling out — now mind you. This was about Lenin and all those base-voiced Russians. I pulled out a big beard made out of mattress stuffing and put it on. It had a mustache. And sat there. This was my statement. Bob Babcock paled. Nobody cracked a smile. The only one laughing was myself. Well, now I couldn't talk through this, read my report so I finally took it off. That shows you how adjusted I was to the academic scene. It was a joke.

MEH: Did you take any art classes?

BM: I took some art classes with Albers. Because I do remember Juppi talking. But not for any extended period of time. Werkelehre. And so on and so forth. But certainly one was aware of Albers [UNINTELLI WORD]. He had no influence on me whatsoever. I don't think anybody did really.

MEH: Do you think if you had gone to a different kind of school, a more conventional school, you would have been happier?

BM: Not necessarily. Mary Emma, I'll tell you this. I don't regret any of this once I'm able to fit it into what I am now. It's not an easy life now always. But I'll tell you. It's magnificent. Truly magnificent. I see myself as a teacher, but a really good teacher. And I attract people to me to learn. Constantly, they come to me. It's just out of the woodwork. Out of the blue. It's quite wonderful.

MEH: Are you teaching now?

BM: No, I'm not a teacher. I'm just a peripatetic teacher. One of those people who — it's because of the way I think. I think — I see things in a perspective. I'm able to fit the past, the future, into the very present. Very interesting, in a very interesting way. In a valid way. So where do I go [UNINTEL WORD] touch? The backyard here for instance. The backyard and make it into the most magnificent space for garden. And this holds true for people relations too. It's not always easy, but it's productive. So, I look at myself as — what am I? Am I a dilettante? No. I'm not a dilettante. But I have a different scope to my calling in life. It is not theater. It is not music. It is not managing an apartment house which I just finished. It's not environmental work. It is teaching people to see in a certain way. Whether this has anything to do with Black Mountain experience I don't

know. I can't say. It has to win a certain way. It's inescapable. But to attribute this development to Black Mountain alone would not be correct. Which brings me to the next point. Brilliant people we teach them — we had bright people at Black Mountain. No. They never made anybody bright. You cannot teach anybody to think. People think they are bright. They are creative before they come there, and they are drawn to a certain place and there they function or they don't function. But there they are with what they bring in in the first place. That's the fallacy of the stated objective of Black Mountain. To teach people — how do we teach people how to think? What a stupid concept. You don't teach people how to think. You develop what they already think. And that's a different thing.

MEH: What — you were at the college when they built the Studies Building?

BM: Yes.

MEH: Did you take part in that?

BM: Yes.

MEH: What do you remember about it?

BM: Being given the dirtiest details. Hauling coal. Moving debris. I wasn't good at hammering. Bob Bliss was there. Bob Bliss. There were gentlemen at Black Mountain. There were very few. Freddie Stone was one of them. And I'm eternally grateful to Freddie. That's why I've called him up twice since those days to say hello and tell him — see even now the emotions, the gratitude that wells up in a way that's very difficult because it only indicates how cruel the rest of them were, in this case, and how much I appreciated the kindness of Fred

Stone. Bob Bliss was also a gentleman. Derek Bovingdon was also a gentleman, a kind person, a humane person. There weren't many other such. There were no other such that I can think of. Never mind qualifying that. After the war I learned of Derek Bovingdon's death. Here we go. It's bound to come up. The energy comes up in an emotional kind of way. But it's not tied up with anything [UNINTELLI WORD] Who cares? But I'll get over this. When you reach a certain peak, it's a normal human thing, but I'm of a Slavic temperament and that coming out in a certain way. When you reach a certain emotional level, you stop talking and you cry. That's a Jacobian [PH]? thing. A comedy. I heard about Derek Bovingdon, and he was a good guy, and I wrote a letter to Bob once reproaching him for not letting me know about this. Why — I don't remember exactly how I sent it to him, but I got a letter from him, a curious and furious note saying you were not told because you are not part of the community, never were, and never could be. Any wonder my strong feelings when BMC comes up.

MEH: Do you think there were other students who had the same experience that you had?

BM: Frances was one. Frances was hurt by Albers. Frances was interested in theater, and when he thought she should go into painting and when she developed — help develop the drama department at Black Mountain, Juppi cut her off. Would not speak to her or give her the time of day. As if she did not live. She remarked on this often. "He won't speak to me." And when you see the letter that Bob Wunsch wrote and his opinion of Albers, you'll see that he was

capable of this kind of thing not only to students but to other faculty members. Please, others did not survive. They pulled out. I held on and I did hold on. I had a certain kind of tenacity that came in conflict not only with the community, the Jerry Wolperts. Oh, that was the bitch of all time. The most snarling ugly temperament imaginable. I went to a party. I'll never forget that. At Lake Eden he couldn't stand to have me in the same room with him. I was evicted from there. It was a party that Freddy Stone gave and Jerry Wolpert was so abusive and so ugly. He cannot stand me. I had to get up finally and left. To come back to other people. Frances was hurt. There were other people. How did I ever hang in? Yes. Tenacity. That really bothered some people the summertime at work camp. Again I was having trouble here because I saw things that did not agree with the official position, and Ted Dreier took me for a walk along the edge of the lake there. We argued. I was at a disadvantage because he was a big guy, a tough one, you know. And certainly he had the advantage of his position there, and I was just a kid trying to hold on for dear life. But at the same time with a terribly strong sense of truth. I say this without any hesitation even though you might say what do you mean by "truth." I knew the lie all the time. I didn't quite know how to articulate this split, but I could reject and I could accept. It was on that level. Ted Dreier told me that I had a faculty, a talent for finding the negative in people. I said, "I'm not looking for the negative. Ted I'm telling you, this is not what the prob- —" He said, "Don't tell me." And finally, "Do you know what?" he said. "If you don't shut up, I swear to God I'll hit you." And he raised his fist at me. That was toward the end. Okay. Well, so, we're all

keyed up people. Where was the leadership in this? I didn't find any. I only stayed there because I found a niche for myself in the last year. Frances and I took out Bob Wunsch's only [UNINTELLI WORD: sounds like "capitalist"], you might say, sort of. The director of the operation. We built a drama shed ourselves. We staged a production which won prizes.

MEH: The Molière?

BM: Yes. Have you heard about that? Yes. I was Mascarille. Mendez Marx was list Le chevalier. Frances did the scenery and the costumes, and it was good. It was good. That was our last hurrah. And it was worthwhile

MEH: What do you remember about that production?

BM: [UNINTEL WORD] I'm glad you brought that up. The first public performance. Mascarille. "To read his thing up there." Magdelon. From the side of the stage Leslie Paul says, "Old Monsieur Vicomte" or whatever it was. "How wonderful you are." "Tell us," she says, "How are you able to do this?" What I have been trying to say. The reply to that in the text is, "I do that quite without study." The place cracked up. It exploded in laughter, and I realized at that moment that they weren't [were?] listening to the play. They were relating to what I just said, to my record history as a student. "I do it quite without study." And I swear there was applause. Pretty funny. That's what I remember best about it. The other thing is that it was a pretty rich performance. The other thing I remember about it is that at the local high school, Leslie Paul was there. Leslie came — no, Leslie Katz. Not Leslie Paul — Leslie Katz came back and said "God that was brilliant." And that moment — do you know the play at all? There was a part

where I notice there's a thread hanging from the gloves, and I took that and started to pick away at it. And because it was there. The heck with the directing. It was there. You do it. I was already a method actor in high school. One of the very first and this was simply — it was not method. It was just doing what comes naturally on stage. It was so revealing of the character of Mascarille, the valet doing his thing. It's [UNINTEL WORD] the pretense. That I remember. And the next thing I remember is Dr. Straus. Dr. Straus, who had me puzzled, kept approaching me in these funny aside ways, saying "Ah, good evening Baron. How are you tonight Baron?" I didn't know what the hell he was talking about. I didn't care about all this. What are you talking about? He must be referring to my aristocratic bearing or whatever, you know. Some term of flattery that I was not aware of. I knew later what he was talking about. Years later at the Everard Baths — the Everard Baths — and who is going from cot to cot. Dr. Straus, feeling up the guys. Dr. Straus. Do you know what he was talking about? Baron de Charez [PH]. He was projecting a role onto me. That was a lopper. I never made the connection. I didn't know what he was talking about because I had not read Remembrance of Things Past so there we have again whether — oh, this guy must've been bisexual because the big joke was Eva Zhitlowsky would sit next to him and get her knee massaged while he was talking about Kant and Nietzsche. There was poor, dear Trudi Straus knowing no pain at all and telling her student who had spent so much time talking about things that happened in Berlin, and it was through her that I first learned about table tipping which Frances and I followed up on borrowing a stool from Rubye

in the kitchen, taking it into the Study Building and tipping the table one night much to the horror of Dr. Straus.

MEH: What is “table tipping?” I don’t know.

BM: Séance. We were curious so — but you had to have a table with no with no in it, and we found there were no tables of the right kind, but there was a stool in the kitchen. So we borrowed that one night and took and it in the studies at Lake Eden and set it down and sat down at the table to see if we could contact the other world, so to speak. Nothing happened and then finally something did happen and it was in the new building already. The next thing I remember is that the table had clunked down. We are in a state of shock. We’re about to ask a question of the spirit, whatever it was, and there comes a knock on the door. “What’s going on here?” John Stix. We couldn’t tell him. And he looked at us — the two of us — sitting around this stool and slammed the door and off he went. Dr. Straus found out about this, and he absolutely forbade any further such practice because it’s contagious. “It will start things going, and I’m afraid I don’t want it.” Et cetera, et cetera. We learned about this from his wife, and it was strictly an adventure. We weren’t serious about it. But he was easily alarmed. He was alarmed, not easily alarmed. He might have had a good reason for it. But anyhow we went on with this, and really after Black Mountain Frances and I did this together with the most extraordinary results. And eventually having to perform for the New York Society for Psychic Research — all of this out of Trudi’s report of how they used to do this as kids in Berlin

MEH: When you are at Black Mountain did you ever go off-campus into Asheville for the village?

BM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Those were happy times. Sundays we all got into a car, somebody's car, I don't know, and went to church. And then Saturday's we'd go into Asheville shopping and end up at Danziger's in Asheville for iced coffee and pastry. Those were very pleasant times. And Sundays after church we'd go to a little place for Sunday chicken dinner off the road somewhere in Swannanoa. Those were pleasant times.

MEH: Who is "we"?

BM: Mrs. Jalowetz. And Trudi Straus came along

MEH: They were going to church?

BM: Yes. Or was it Mary Barnes? Somebody. Some of the staff members, and I don't remember who drove us in, but it was mostly the staff. Whether it was Frances or somebody else. Probably Frances did. Although I doubt it. I don't know. Somebody else. Anyway, there we were packed in the car and off we'd go. Those were nice times. It was very different from the rest of it. How you can be there three years and remember only three classes, three teachers, I don't know. I have no idea what did we do, what did I do with all that time besides suffer. One day I remember — you know, it was Easter break, after Easter break — I heard from somebody. I think it was Maude Dabbs said, "Oh, you didn't go away. And I noticed the light was on in your study. All this time you're studying. Oh I'm so pleased and frankly surprised." Maude Dabbs. Well, if anybody — if I did something like that, it was an event. Everybody noticed. That

tells you something else. What I don't know exactly. I studied the violin. Gave up singing because I couldn't speak after Mrs. Jalowetz. Went to chorus. Hauled coal. The rest of it I guess was Calvary time, suffering. [LAUGHS]

MEH: You left when you went into service?

BM: Yes. Yes.

MEH: What branch of the service?

BM: Medics. I was a Conscientious Objector. It took a heck of a lot of courage to take a stand, but from the age of about thirteen, I think, I could not understand the logic of killing and war, and so it was not anything that had just happened. It was certainly was not cowardice or fear. I took a stand. I went through the whole rigmarole of investigation. Appeared before judges and my — I just found a voice, and I stood up to authority with strength and conviction and finally was discovered to be a bona fide conscientious objector. Other examples of my non-aggressive position was [COUGHS], excuse me, were discovered in interviews with the people in Bronxville. [TELEPHONE RINGS. INTERRUPTION IN TYPING.]

MEH: I was just reading Bob Wunsch's letter to you after you left the college.

[END OF TAPE ONE SIDE TWO. BEGINNING OF TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE.]

MEH: I was commenting that Bob Wunsch's letters here that I was just reading to you — after you left the college — were really very friendly. They aren't hostile or mean or anything I would expect from what you told me.

BM: I wondered. I wondered. So to get that kind of reply from him over one point was perplexing to say the least.

MEH: Your point being.

BM: My point being that I was left out on something very important and that was Derek Bovington's death. Not to be told and then to be told in those — and that violent way. I was not entitled to that because I was not a member of the community never was and never could be.

MEH: Do you have a copy of that letter?

BM: The most powerful letters I have ever received from anybody I do not have any more and that is quite an correspondence that includes no less than Lillian Hellman, Eugene O'Neill's wife Carlotta. You know, there's a response to that too. Before you're experienced enough, you don't hold onto these things. At least I have not. I know better now. I have a file now of these letters so I have a lot of correspondence. But at that time I did not.

MEH: After you — two people — one person you had noted there Larry Kocher.

BM: Yes, Larry.

MEH: Do you have any particular remembrance — recollections of him?

BM: Yes. A decent guy. A decent guy who invited people to this house for Christmas parties during the Christmas season. Business-like. No other impression beyond that. Not exactly one of a crowd. He — a clean standard guy. The Kochers were nice people. Very different from the others.

MEH: What about Mendez Marks?

BM: Mendez Marks. Oh, Lord, that's a book in itself. Mendez Marks was a roommate along with Windholz. I have to tell you that because at that time I was a little boy, actually still practicing my Roman Catholic background, and

late at night I would come in out of my study and in the bedroom, and I would kneel down by my bed and say my prayers. I thought no one knew. But they did. And one day, I think it was Mendy, "I see you pray when you come in and we admire you for that." That was good. That was nice. One of the better things. Leonard Billings was also a nice guy. And Bela Martin. Mendez Marks. You know Mendez Marks history don't you?

MEH: I really don't really know that much about him.

BM: You don't know about him?

MEH: I know some things. Tell me what you know.

BM: Oh, that's one of the saddest stories ever, but it's fantastic from beginning to end. We were bedroom mates. We had a connection. He — in spite of the fact he was kind of, how shall we say, accepted by the community, he was still an outsider. What his specialty was and how he functioned as a student I don't know, but Mendez was very witty, had no problem expressing himself. So he was kind of the community clown. But they did respect him, and he did merit respect. But he, Frances and I had a kind of a triumvirate there. Afterwards I went in the Army. He was whatever that — he was gay so he could not get in the Army. He lived in the Village. He and Frances, my future wife, kept in touch. As a matter of fact they lived together for a while. Frances tried to lead him on the straight and narrow. It didn't work. And we did have — we had a kind of affection for him — each other, all three of us. One day — and, oh, John Stix comes into the scene. John Stix and Mendez were very good friends. And then Mendez went into the loony bin.

MEH: You mean into —

BM: He had —

MEH: — an insane asylum.

BM: Well, let me tell you. I can't describe exactly. He was catatonic. While I was in the Army, Frances and Mendez knew each other. Mendez became — got a job the *New Yorker* — *New Yorker* magazine and did very well, as a writer, as an editor. I don't know exactly — I don't remember exactly. That career came to a sudden end, and the next I remember of Mendez is that he's up there, up the river, at a state institution behind bars. Frances and I used to get into a car and drive up there weekends to help Mendez because he had no one here. John Stix by this time had removed himself from his pal Mendy completely. This may not be altogether true, but that was the impression we got. Frances and I never, never went up there to see Mendy and did not hear from Mendez when he had his lucid moments that John ever came to see him. We would take him out for a walk, pulling him out of a line of these catatonic cases and try to bring him into some sort of consciousness of — Something else to help him out. It never happened repeatedly.

MEH: What do you think cast him into this state?

BM: I have no idea. We were never able to find out. They would not give us the medical records on it and [UNINTELLI WORD] to try. We did try but they — we were not family and they were not free to give us that information. He had no one else here to help out at that time, and as far as we knew — we finally had to give up because it was a trial. It was very taxing. It was very difficult to go up

there and to try to bring him to life. And the only way we could do that was to make fools of ourselves. When we ridiculed each other, Mendy found that very funny and he would laugh. That was only way we could get a response out of him. The rest of the time he was cut off. Absolutely silent. His head hanging low. Neurological, psychological, who knows? But he was most definitely catatonic. And finally we had to give up. We couldn't bring him into our lives even if we wanted to because we were married by then and there was a family on the way. It was just — we couldn't risk any kind of serious invasion of anybody's problems. And I guess — I don't know what happened finally, but his relatives in San Antonio did not connect with him. As so far as I know, he might still be alive or might be dead.

MEH: I was told that he committed suicide.

BM: Mendy did.

MEH: That's what I've been told.

BM: That's a second suicide. The other one is Bill Reed. Did you know about that?

MEH: I've heard different stories.

BM: I haven't heard any stories, but it was in one of those books that came from Black Mountain where Bill Reed is mentioned incidentally — incidental to the Albers. And they had a surrogate son Bill Reed, and it is said that he committed suicide.

MEH: Ohm —

BM: It's just — can you tell me what you heard about Bill.

MEH: I think it was — there was some question. He drowned off of Martha's Vineyard, and there's some question as to whether it was suicide or not suicide. It was not that clear cut. I don't think there was any suicidal note, but a lot of people close to him felt that it was suicide. So I really can't say.

BM: I have to say this about Bill. Bill was not a bad role model aside from the sexual problem. He was a thoroughly admirable person.

MEH: That's what everybody says.

BM: Admirable, admirable. And very kind and he was in a very strange position. He still had the impulse in that direction, but he was locked in not only by the community but by his record so he had to be very careful. That was pre-Stonewall time or whatever that thing is called, you know. In those days any difference of that kind was a very serious one, and the law was against it as well. And look at Bob Wunsch, you see. But I must say, yes, he was a good guy. Really good. Oh, no, I never got the benefit of it in spite of the fact I admired him so much. But he was in the clutches of the Dreiers, and that was home base for him and so that's forgivable. Everything was forgivable actually.

MEH: What can you tell me about Frances Kuntz? You were both were both from Bronxville.

BM: I can't tell you the whole story. It's another book. You know, what would you like to know about Frances?

MEH: Frances. Who was she?

BM: Frances Kuntz was the daughter of Adelaide Kuntz, who married out *déclassé*. But an interesting story too. Do you want to hear it? Frances's mother came out

of the Carolina — or was it Georgia — mountains. She happened to be the grandniece of Mrs. Henry Phipps. You know the Henry Phippses. The Carnegie thing. Part of the Carnegie steel. So Adelaide was not to be outdone by her stepsister who was acceptable to the Phippses. Adelaide was not. Adelaide was not pretty. Adelaide was the sore thumb and was excluded. But that didn't stop her. She was a very aggressive person. She came out of the mountains, went to Aunt Annie — Aunt Annie Phipps — and was taken in. Eventually she married but again in the very same way that Frances did later. She married out of her class. She married a gifted, lower-class — what shall I call it — guy who was a very gifted artist. They went to the south of — to Paris, to France and there became part of the international art elite of the time which included Gertrude Stein, Picasso and so on and so forth. Frances was born in Paris, was treated in a very unnatural way — not in an unnatural way. How would you say — an exceptional way. Let's call it that. In other words, she did not have a normal family background or upbringing. And to enforce that being — a brilliant person — she was turned over to the Russells, Bertie and Bertha Russell. And the Russells did their thing with her, and the damage was done all along the line so that by the time she came to Black Mountain, she was living on pills. Boxes of different medications. All kinds of neurological and physical problems. Eventually those medications — she survived many of them — but finally she tried to attempt suicide twice.

MEH: After Black Mountain, or before Black Mountain?

BM: Oh, no. This was after our marriage and divorce and family and everything else. After our divorce, not during. Thank God. She tried to commit suicide twice, was saved, and finally we divorced. She married again, and her health was very poor and she just died two years ago.

MEH: How many children did you have?

BM: Just one. Chad [or Tad].

MEH: And did she worked professionally?

BM: She did. Her career in theater was limited. She never quite made it. But it's interesting. I mean, this is again is a side issue that has nothing to do with Black Mountain really. But it's still interesting. She had a choice of suitors. Chose the most talented one. Not a basis for a marriage. That's from her standpoint. From mine, we don't need to go into that except we had a very close relationship. Always did. But it was too close. We overlapped. We finally had no individuality. So she knew what I was thinking before I did. It was a very tight thing. It was impossible to continue that way. So I moved to California expecting her to follow me. She came out to California, couldn't stand the wide-open spaces there, and quickly ran back to New York. Stayed there until we divorced. And that was that. She remarried. I did not. I will never marry again, says I. but I never say no anymore. I've learned to say that, you know. Don't say "No." "Yes," if it's right. Don't say "No." You never know. I doubt that I shall marry again because of finances. I would be — I have a friend in New York. She is extremely wealthy. We're very close. She doesn't need my money. I don't need her money. But at the same time there is a certain kind of

obligation, and I've already committed myself to Chad [Tad?] and to my grandchildren. Now that's that. Meanwhile I am looking to expand my family experience beyond the biological. That has to do with environment, a call from the environmental center. I was now just on the telephone. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING ?] — plus a family that I would like to develop in Europe, in Poland and wherever else there are openings or a need.

.MEH: What did you do after — where were you stationed during the war?

BM: Where was I stationed? British Columbia. Prince Rupert, Port Edward, Seattle.

MEH: And what did you do after the war?

BM: After the war I went — began a career. I've had a number of careers. I've had several careers. The first one was theater. A very active one and considering quite successful one. I was a featured player. I was one of the first performers of television.

MEH: Where were you living then?

BM: In New York. In the city.

MEH: I think I had a record that you acted under a different name than Bernard Malek.

BM: Yes, yes. Heldabrand H-E-L-D-A-B-R-A-N-D. John. Went to study acting at the Neighborhood Playhouse. Was admitted with the assistance of Raymond Gram Swing's wife. Does that name mean —? Betty Swing, who had that contact there with Dieter Morgenthau. They didn't want me there. Cast out all the time. Didn't want me there. Sandy Meisner didn't like me. The ostensible reason being that I had gone to college. And he hated college people. Well, if he had

given a moment's thought to my college background, it wouldn't have bothered him because — college. I didn't have a degree. It was just a kind of fill in, you know. So — anyway, Sandy said "No." Rita said "Yes." So he took me in on tolerance upon which began a very stormy two-year relationship at which point — no, during which time they found out that there was a gift here. It was just there. You know, you do things because you are that. There's no point in making a secret of it. The gift was — extraordinary interesting point though. It's interesting. Bring me back to this if I wander away from it. But I was a classical actor. Do you know what that means? That means form. That means idea. If I had gone to France, I would have fit in gloriously. The theater, National Theatre, of Racine and [UNINTELLI WORD]. Or if I had gone to England to study. Same thing. No, it didn't work out that way. What happened was that I got to the Neighborhood Playhouse. The chain of events. It's interesting. Went in summer stock. There was an actor who said, you know, "You're a very good actor but you need more acting technique." Let me see if I can connect this. Well, he made the connection, but he didn't get me in. It was Betty Gram Swing who got me in over tea and crumpets with Rita and the other gals there. The guy who got me in was Eli Wallach. He was the one who told me he wanted to get me into the Neighborhood Playhouse. Sandy could not stand me. Could not stand me because I represented a certain social background. He could not accept the fact that my people, my background was working class but I did have a certain quality, a certain air, and certain — what was that — impression. I created a certain impression. It wasn't teaching reality and that was what was happening

at that time. The group theater influence was the leading aesthetic, the leading idea in theater at that time. Anyhow, from time to time they would tell me this, and it meant nothing to me. But the level of the talent was genius. Genius. I say that word because it's come up several times. It's the kind of thing they throw around carelessly in Hollywood. It means you've done something good that they approve of. But here it was a level of genius. Which means a level of vision and creativity that is beyond the usual. I managed to hang in at the Neighborhood Playhouse, and after graduating changed my name to Heldabrand, and was invited by Sandy Meisner to come in as his assistant. [LAUGHTER] I was his assistant for one year until my genius started to assert itself and that was it. Sandy couldn't stand that so I was fired at which point — that was about 1954 — I had made my Broadway debut in Lillian Hellman's *Montserrat*. After that followed by a revival of *King Lear* playing with Hubert [Walden] [PH]. Exposed to the perceptive eye of John Houseman. Louis Calhern as Lear. After that came something else, yes, *The Immoralist*. Also successful. That was an interesting one because of the part of the cast. Jimmy Dean was there and who else? Louis Jourdan, Gerry Page. And that takes us into '54. Again, this restless talent came up with something else. Shall I tell you about that? Since I had done *King Lear* on Broadway, I figured I qualified — I was qualified to do it again. They were auditioning for a television version of *King Lear* with Orson Welles. Orson Welles auditioned me and got very nervous because my approach — I used the "To be or not to be" speech from *Hamlet*. And it was far from orthodox, but it is a valid one, and it holds very well

if you have —if you see *Hamlet* being performed for the first time rather than afterwards and when the interpretation is psychological where Shakespeare anticipates psychology. But at the same time, he's talking to an audience who is thinking in terms of the past. So my use of "To be or not to be" was in the form of a lecture, and I talked to Welles as he sat there. And said "To be or not to be, that is the question. And therefore, we are all cowards." Do you understand? I said — in fact, by this time Welles was up against the last seat of the theater. Digging furiously and into his nose." Thank you. Dismissed." I was not right. Well, I got pissed off about that, and I thought," Well, the hell with you. I know King Lear. I'll put together a cast of my own." That same night when Welles was doing King Lear on television, I had my own *King Lear* in my apartment. King Lear was Sam Jaffe. There was Eli Wallach. There was Marty Molson [PH]. There was — the three girls who were Julie Harris, Maureen Stapleton and the author — Oh, no. Ann Jackson. Yes, Ann had to be there. They were the three ladies. Frank Lazzaro was the Fool. I played the Bastard and it was such a successful evening, Mendez — no Mendy Wager. Do you know Mendy Wager? Mendy Wager was an actor. Michael Wager? No? Michael Wager was an actor at one time and the lover of Leonard Bernstein. Mendy said, "Hey this is great. Do you realize how many people around here would love to be — participate in this kind of thing? This started evenings once a week of Shakespeare in our apartment. The whole thing. All the comedies. All the tragedies in our apartment with everybody of any statue or achievement in the theater coming in. And Sam, looking at this said, "Hey, you know, this is great. Why don't you

do this for the public?" Which opened up a contact at the New School for Social Research down there. And for two seasons did something called concert readings. John Heldabrand Presents Concert Readings. And every actor worth — not worth — but of any statue came in there and performed. I brought to Brattle [PH] people — Ute Hagen did *Doctor's Dilemma* and interestingly enough most of these people were people who were our work because they were blacklisted by McCarthy. I was apolitical. I knew these people because David Pressman was assistant to Sandy Meisner at the Neighborhood Playhouse. David introduced me to this avenue of things, and that's the way the political connection directed the course of my life and from then on. The readings were very successful and again how interesting. They were stopped by the very people that were to benefit by it. And they were all left-wingers. Every one of them. They stopped me. Blanche Yurka stopped it.

MEH: Why?

BM: Because I was — the situation that should be brought to a head. Unemployment. Unfairness of the capitalistic system was being alleviated by a middle course. It was a profit-sharing situation. All the money that came in at the box office for a two-dollar ticket went back to the actors. I was taking only what I had put in. No pay whatsoever. And all the rest — William Redfield was another one — and he admitted to me once. Do you know who put a stop to that? I did." And then Redfield was a queen. Blanche Yurka, Nancy Pollock. They stopped it. And the only one who came to the rescue of this thing was another left-winger. Herman Shumlin. He says — I met him on Third Avenue

once and he says, "You know, I have to tell you John — I guess they call me John by that time — I have to tell you it's absolutely wonderful. And if you ever need help or assistance, let me know and I will help you." Well by this time, the noose had tightened around my neck. I had become very shy, very backward. I guess I thanked him for it, but I couldn't follow up on it because they were after me. And I was not articulate enough. I was not oriented to the scene politically or even psychologically. I was a guy who was doing a thing as it came to me. I didn't plan. I didn't do these things. I saw something. I went after it and it worked. That kind of thing —spontaneous, intuitive thing — which is very good if the conditions are right. Why did Black Mountain produce this crop of great talents at one point and not another? Not because the talents weren't there, but because the — what's the word? The meeting. What's the word for it? The confluence of time was different at one time than — there were Rauschenberg's. There were de Kooning's. There were great actors, great directors in 1938 to 1940, 1941 but again the time was not ripe for them so they went off on a tangent. The guys who came in — the equivalent of those people — later on were there at the right time. Swackhamer was there. Arthur Penn was there. Afterwards I couldn't even get to knock on the door of Arthur Penn. He would have nothing to do with me. He knew about me. Swackhamer never gave me a job as an actor. Would have nothing to do with me. Why? I don't know. The record was there. We should have been — should have had some solidarity. There was none. All these things begin to tie together. After the New School thing was sabotaged by the very people who were to benefit by it, I met

one of these people who had suffered from the McCarthy hearings, and she said “You know, these guys. It’s such a tragedy. We worked together. They’re in a position to help us out. They don’t know us. They don’t know us.” The same thing here. This is where Black Mountain comes in. At the time that I was there, there was a schism. There was a break. Not a schism. That’s not the right word. There’s a distinct difference between the intellectual concept of mankind and humanity and the actual one. A day-to-day kindness and consideration and sensitivity. The latter never turned up at Black Mountain in my experience.

MEH: What did you do after the New School?

BM: After the New School, let’s see. I had been fired from there, at the New School. I did a few more plays, all of them dogs. And hated like Broadway. I don’t like exposure. I would have been much happier directing, and I did direct. One thing I did that was interesting, one more thing. Since jobs were scarce and since I knew of talent that can being used and that there was a place for [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING ?] not that can be used [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING ?] an idea came up and that was to do living room performances. So I organized a production of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The first. You know, after that which was done down that Joe Papp’s place. The Public Theater. Before it was that, it was that it was the Shakespeare Theater down on Eighth Street. A wonderful production with a screen and with whatever fabrics were around. Plumes, feathers, candlelight, a recording for who is — do you know the play at all? “Who is Sylvia” is one of the — “Who is Sylvia? What is she?” Which Schubert set to music. I found the music, perfect, in Telemann, a suite by

Telemann “Were for the words —“ [UNINTELLI]. I recorded that and we sang that and performed it in private homes and studios. I had an invitation to develop this on the Long Island North Shore. There were people who had done *Hamlet*, any number of things. I would’ve had *carte blanche* I was told. Marcus Sullivan, Westchester. I mean the Connecticut unit of — around Stratford was interested. By this time I had withdrawn. I was not interested in theater. Bad experiences. Bad experiences all around. I couldn’t wait to get out of it. That along with problems in my marriage at this time because we needed money and didn’t have it. So, I was forced to take all kinds of work that were off — away from the kind of thing I felt I should be doing. So the marriage started to deteriorate, and finally it was a question of either jumping out the window of the 21st floor or going to California. I chose the latter. Went to California, and Frances never followed. Out there I pursued my landscaping career. Never able to break into the movies or television. It was too late by that time, for whatever reason. John Huston was out there. He encouraged me to go back to the theater but at that — I don’t do things like that. It’s just not my nature. I could not go back to the theater. I had had it. That was it. He made it very clear that I was not suited for the movies. I did not have the bone structure nor the temperament, et cetera, et cetera, to cope with the Hollywood politics. Hollywood politics are a very special thing. But John was always a supporter. John wanted to get me into the Juilliard School. That did not work out because I was too shy to see John, too withdrawn. John wanted to get me into Shakespeare Stratford Theatre. I did not get the job, and I parted from him. I

wrote the play. I sent it to John — a movie — and John was interested. Wanted to see me. And I could not — I did not follow up because I could not. So the script sits here today. I've shown it to one of my students and was told that — it was returned. No, absolutely no. Several months later I see in the trade news that Sydney Pollack has a script. He stole the idea. I got nothing out of it, not even so much as a fare-the-well, or a thank you or a job. I would have been very happy to have a walk on. I couldn't get that. So you can see how that would kind of sour me on the business. I had no support. No foundation there at all. It was a quicksand situation. I came back here because my parents needed money, help at that time. Came back here to help my parents. Never went back. Sold my equipment — landscaping business in California. Came here and took a little job, temporary job, and it's just now that I have parted with that temporary job. It became management of a co-op building and have pretty much grown up there, found my bearings. I know where I stand now and I'm ready to begin.

MEH: What are you beginning?

BM: The thing that I feel is needed most and that I can relate to best, environmental work. As a teacher, as an activist. Whatever. I'm willing to go to school. I'm willing to get my diplomas, degrees, whatever. To associate myself with all the most active, the most effective people. Right now I have my eye on Bobby Kennedy, Jr. I heard him talk the other night and we connected. I liked him. I liked him. I don't like the others in the family, but I really admire and respect him. I think we can connect. This is leading to other things. I took the call that

came this afternoon a while ago was from the Center. They want to speak to me today. I would like to connect with them. I also connect with the Vice President — with Gore's office — to see if I can somehow get some kind of lead to environmental work in Poland when I go there. If I can then that also would be an interesting opening. I did not foresee any extended work in that because the situation there is so locked. It is one of the worst pollution areas world. One of the worst, and including the mental pollution. The Polish people have been locked into a mental pollution that will be very difficult to break through. However I do have a connection there at the Poznań University which will be just a pebble, an atom Why not?

MEH: Your background is Polish?

BM: Yes, my parents were born in Poland.

MEH: What did your parents do? What did your father do?

BM: My father, interestingly enough, was several things. What he did originally — he was a laborer. He finally became a weaver of some skill and reputation at the Alexander Smith Factory here in Yonkers. When the Alexander Smith were people shut, he became a superintendent in Bronxville and that's —

MEH: Superintendent?

BM: — superintendent, a building superintendent, yeah, of a large complex of houses that today are a co-op. They're still there. And with that I was moved into a sphere that has led to where we are today. I was at first socially unacceptable because Bronxville is very snobby and then by sheer dent of talent and indifference to everything except what I had to do, I gained the

respect of the community and was socially acceptable as well as in every other way. That was quite a step forward. That led to exposure to different experiences, different kinds of people, and eventually led to this conversation here.

MEH: It's interesting that you've retained this connection to Poland. Are you an only child?

BM: No. No. There were three of us. My connection to Poland. Up until 1940 or '50, I did not think in English.

MEH: You spoke Polish at home?

BM: I spoke Polish at home. But the voice placement. I could never hear anything that resembled anything that was American. I was an alien. Took speech lessons at one point. I'll never forget that. Learning how to speak in my last year of high school. Came back from speech lessons — absolutely a case of locked jaw. Could not think, speak or connect thoughts together. Even at Black Mountain. I would sit there, and Frances would say "Now read this. Try. Read." And she would give me — she would direct me to read paragraphs out of the books. And somehow sound didn't connect with the idea. I would jump, skip lines, and suddenly none of it made sense. And even after marriage, Frances would say "You can't talk that way. That's not the way to talk. There's something very odd. You've got to learn how to speak." Well, one day I made the break in an interesting way. It happened up in Boston. I was doing a play and went to a ball game — Boston Red Sox playing a Chicago team. And sitting there, I thought "Is it possible that I need to make an arbitrary choice — a

choice, not an arbitrary choice but a choice of will to affiliate myself with something. If I want to fit in with society, do I have to be? I'd changed my name — I'm Ben — but still Bernard. [GIVES POLISH PRONUNCIATION] But I still don't feel like I'm an American. How do you do this? Well, here I am in Boston. Okay. Do I have a favorite team? Yes, I do. I'm in Boston. I have no reason to choose the Chicago team. I choose Boston. This is my team. By this artificial device, I was able to associate with the outer scene. And from then on the speech problem cleared up, the thinking changed. And today I can hear the American language, and I can speak it. I can write rather well. Oh, what happened then? After coming back here, I was a newspaper writer for ten years and couldn't write my way out of a paper bag, but by accident that I was asked to review — they knew I had theater experience — to review a local theatrical production at the tennis club here, and that put me in connection with the Martinelli Papers and that started a career in reviewing the arts. Very successful. Very well written. So interesting that David Frost was going to have me on the program because of this interesting approach to the arts. But again, it was taking a page from Shaw. Bernard Shaw didn't write about the play or the performance. He related it to the social scene, and I took that as my model and did the same thing. As a result I could be talking about the coming revolution as soon as I could be talking about *Butterflies Have Wings* or whatever the movie was that Casellos [PH] directed. So, you see, we're coming back now to BMC. The point of this whole thing here. On the one hand, it seems like an isolated thing because I was not locked into an orthodox plan or scheme, I have been

open ever since, never locked in and, as I say, today I don't think in terms of past. I think of where I am now and am about to begin. I think that has something to do with Black Mountain. As much as I hate the place — the mention of it and everything else — I'm grateful for being put into that situation where I was on the edge. Where I was an outsider. Where I was tolerated. Where I had the opportunity to find myself. But not according to plan. Possibly a larger plan. Et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Oh, I danced —

MEH: The reviews were called "Random Reviews."

BM: "Random Reviews." So that I picked out anything I wanted to, called up the press office, and by this time. I'd chosen the venues that I wanted to cover. And I was welcome at the Met, Lincoln Center, Carnegie Hall, wherever.

MEH: What paper —?

BM: I was the Martinelli Papers. Not a very important publication, but it had quite a circulation then and still does. But strictly a political thing. But it was an opening for me, and my trick was to write damn good review — articles — not that they were reviews. Favorable or not did not make any difference. They were educated. They were interesting reading, and they were good copy for those guys to get hold of. So they're on file at all of these places here. Major places. They caught the eye of, as I say, of David Frost and a few other people and so —

[END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO. BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO.]

BM: I stopped it because I had said everything I wanted to say. I wasn't interested in performance. I was interested in educating the public, to seeing, to hearing, to

observing in a different way. And that could not be a repetition of the same old repertory — repertoire or whatever. I could not review several performances of Beethoven's *Violin Concerto* or the standard repertoire. My interest — I'll give you an example: the focus for a long time was in Arnold Schoenberg. Why I like Schoenberg, I don't know. But I did. I still do. I consider him one of the — well, there's more to it. I do. I have not only a high respect for his music, an appreciation. I do consider him — it is my private very strong conviction that he is one of the saints of music from beginning to end. The clue is in his opera *Moses and Aaron*. But "But I lack the word." That's the last word that is spoken. It is not sung. And I know what that word is. That word relates — do you want me to rattle on like this?

MEH: Okay.

BM: But that word relates to ties in metaphysics with quantum physics and the unified theory of — science where it is today. And it's the same expression. Einstein said — I'm not sure that Planck said it but Einstein said it. "But I lack the word." And here you have it in music. Well, my approach to reviews was to tie in this idea of infillment [MALEK'S WORD] of human, of civilization of whatever. The thought — infillment — a certain kind of thought in a way and relating it to the arts. Interestingly enough, performing artists, even today, don't think that way. I went to a performance of — by the Tokyo Quartet in Purchase a while ago — two summers ago. I heard Webern's — are you into music?

MEH: Not —

BM: Well, Webern and Schoenberg and Alban Berg relate to Jalowetz. Okay you've got that.

MEH: Right.

BM: Well, actually, I said this is really one of the — why is it that painting, sculpture, modern art draws crowds, whereas music — modern music, Twentieth Century music — does not. It's a turnoff. You can't sell tickets to these things. Do you mean to tell me that there's a connection — do you think there's a connection between painting and this? Of course, there is. There is between that and between nutrition, between esthetics, between all events. You simply cannot separate these things. But it was news to the performing artists of the Tokyo Quartet, a major world organization, that this might be possible. I asked them about Jalowetz. What does the name Jalowetz mean to you? Drew a blank. Nothing. So I told them. They said, "Oh, that's interesting. When we go to Europe, we will be on the lookout for Jalowetz." I said, "Well, you might do better by just coming back here and going to San Francisco because his papers are in an archive there somewhere. Meanwhile, I wrote Lisa a note after asking you, and I hope to get an answer from you. I like to develop Jalowetz into the mainstream of musical performance today. Don't stop because — continue. But this is the way I work. My idea — I cannot stand Johannes Brahms. Brahms puts me to sleep. And it's not just esthetic. I discovered that there is a certain vibrational level in the Brahms music that can be related to the vibrational level of the fetus — the human fetus. There have been experiments performed where they were able to read and compare those vibrations. I, being

an original — let's call it that — in my own way of thinking. Why do it fall asleep? This is good stuff, but I go to sleep. I know why. Because I was in tune to that vibration — I feel — level which is of some interest but not pertinent to what we're talking about now. I was always pushing in my writings contemporary music and the New Vienna School of Schoenberg. Got nowhere. I said everything I had to say, and when there was no response, screw it. Goodbye. You know, you're on your own. I've done my best. Now take off and do your own thing. So I stopped altogether. The same thing with ballet. When Balanchine died — watch your time — when Balanchine died, what followed him was a down. Why bother? Other performances, why bother? They'll take care of themselves. There's always Beethoven. There's always Brahms. You'll do your festivals endlessly. And you don't give a damn about John Adams about the others around him. Harbison, so on and so forth. So why bother?

MEH: Do you think it matters —?

BM: The mindless, mindless destruction of the plantings around the property.

MEH: Do you mean the property you were managing?

BM: Yes. Yes. That — there were two managers. I was on the location and there was a manager — management at some distance from the building.

MEH: Was this in Yonkers?

BM: No, this was in Scarsdale. Permission was given the superintendent to take his power saw and cut down trees. There were specimen trees there, and it as like I had been myself cut down. I opened my mouth. I shut my mouth. I yelled. I protested. I even contacted environmental groups to come in on this, and that's

where we parted company. I was told it was none of my business. "Well, the planet is my business, and you can take your job and shove it. That's it." And with that it took a little time and there was a big to-do about that. I finally had to engage a lawyer to protect my position under the circumstances. And I departed. So now I've been getting this house in order. I'm developing the new Northampton scene. I'm getting ready to go to Poland where I expect to spend some time in the future if I come out alive because you're really — there you're really fighting tremendous forces, not the least of them being the American tobacco industry. So that's no joke. But I'll do it slowly. Whatever I can contribute I share. I'm not going to be put off by the fact that I'm not changing the world totally at this time but drop by drop. It happens. That's my contribution. A reflection on the rest of it. I don't like the public scene. I don't like to be in the public eye. I don't feel comfortable there. I don't like interviews. This worked against my career in theater because I was not interested in promoting a mystique. I did not like interviews or times when we were sitting around the table with Leonard Lyons in the theater at the time, and they wanted to know how this project came apart [about?]. Why is it that Franchot Tone, Geraldine Page are doing *Strange Interlude* at the New School of Research. They didn't have the answer and they turned to me, and I did things instinctively. I had no answer to that so I dried up. But that's the way it was. Then — I've learned how to articulate and speak. As you can tell, it's nonstop once I get started. So I have my sense of confidence, and I've got my bearings now. That has nothing to do with the performing arts or theater up to a point. Only as much as they

affect the environment. My concept of environment goes beyond trees, bushes, water and smoke. Man is environment. The very organism is environment. And that's a good place to work from. We are a combination of air and everything else.

[END OF INTERVIEW. END OF TRANSCRIPT]