Interviewee: JACK RICE
Participant: BARBARA RICE
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION] I've just had a harrowing drive with a beautiful view. (LAUGHTER) [IRRELEVANT REMARKS NOT TRANSCRIBED]. Jack, how did you come to be at Black Mountain?

JR: That's kind of a long story, actually. I first heard of Black Mountain during World War Two. I was in the Marine Corps serving overseas in the South Pacific. I remember one night before a particularly harrowing raid that we made I was sitting and talking with a fellow who was from Kentucky. We were bolstering each other's courage by talking about after the War etcetera. I indicated to him that I had hoped, I was hoping to be able to go to some small college, that I really had little taste for the big colleges. He told me that he had actually attended at Berea – Berea, Kentucky – a school there, and that once he had visited at a place in North Carolina called Black Mountain College and described a little bit about it. It just sounded fascinating to me. It sounded exactly like what I had hoped to be able to do in continuing any education. So when the war was over and I was discharged, I wrote and got back a brochure and a note and invitation to apply. Curiously enough, my brother Dan at that

time was still – he had served in the Navy, and he was there. His ship was tied up in Long Beach, which is where I was staying. He was awaiting discharge, and when we got together, I described to him the school. He thought, “Wonderful.” He and I had never had a chance to be in the same school at the same time because there was four year's difference. I'm four years older than he is, so as he was coming into the school, I was getting out and so on. So now he had caught up with me because of the time. So, we decided we would apply together, which we did. Well, Dan was busy seeing a girlfriend at the time, and it got to be very hot and heavy and all of his shore leave was being given over to this girl. I finally coaxed out of him writing his personal "reason why I want to go to Black Mountain" statement, but the rest of it – I filled in some of the forms and questionnaires for him, and we shipped it all off to the school. But in the meantime he was discharged, and we finally received two telegrams. Dan was accepted and I was rejected. (LAUGHS) It was an outrage. I just couldn't understand why. Our grade levels were about the same. So, I thought, “Well, this is ridiculous. They've made some kind of gross mistake and we'll just pack up and go back anyhow.” So we did pack up and took a Greyhound bus and went all the way across the country to North Carolina, checked in at the Black Mountain Inn, and went off to visit the college. They were delighted to see Dan and appalled to see me, because they didn't know what the hell to do with me (LAUGHS). It was very embarrassing. I said, “Well, you know, I felt really that they had made a terrible mistake,” and knowing that they used different committees to pass judgment, I didn't hesitate to ask them on what grounds

was I being turned down. Finally it turned out – I forgot exactly who was the informant – it had been judged that I dominated my brother, and he needed desperately to get out from under my domination and have a chance to stretch his own wings of becoming independent and if I chose to apply later on that was fine. Meantime they were very sorry that I had made the trip, but there was no room. They had taken on already so many students that half of the overflow of maybe ten kids were living with farmers up and down the road to Black Mountain. So, I packed up and went back home and went to – I spent some time going to Santa Barbara, University of Santa Barbara at that time. The next, inside the next year, I met Barbara and we got married the following year. Dan, meantime, spent no more than – I think he spent really less than a semester and was so exhilarated that he, in company with some friend of his, a designer – artist by the name of Don Wight, if I remember rightly, came soaring out to California so we saw him again.

MEH: Where did you live? You were from California, right?

JR: I was born in the state of Washington. Dan was born here in California. Our family migrated from the state of Washington down here to California, when I was about sixteen and Dan was about twelve. At any rate, when I told Barbara about the school, she got all enthusiastic about it so we decided to go ahead and make application.

MEH: Barbara, where were you at the time? Were you a student or –

BR: When I encountered him?

MEH: Yeah, how did you meet?

BR: Oh, I was working up in Sequoia. I used to go up there. I was a student and I used to go up there in the summertime and do dogsbody work just to be there. It was so beautiful. I did that for several years and I finally met Jack. He was the butcher's helper and I was the ice cream dipper. But I had a stand outside under the sequoia tree, so it was an exquisite experience. But I had heard of Black Mountain College when I was a young person. I think I read an article by Louis Adamic, who had visited the college. I don't know if that was in a magazine called Coronet? Something like that. I also read about it in some other thing, so that when I met Jack and he mentioned it, I knew what it was. So it didn't fail me. It was a very marvelous experience, and probably one of the most intense experiences of my life because I was there at two different times. One, I was there in 1948-49 and then we were there in 1952-53, when there was a total change of the watch. One was Bauhaus and the other was New York and Charles Olson and so on. No, I'm a New Yorker.

MEH: You're a New Yorker, but you were on the West Coast.

BR: My family moved to the West Coast in 1943.

MEH: Okay. Where were you when you met?

BR: Sequoia.

JR: In Sequoia, that summer.

MEH: That summer. Sequoia is… (OVERTALK)

JR: (OVERTALK) I went up to work in the park company also.

MEH: (OVERTALK) Is that north of Yosemite?

JR: Sequoia Park is the National Park with the great Sequoia Trees.

MEH: It's the Sequoia Park?

BR: Yes.

JR: Sequoia National Park.

MEH: Okay. I didn't know if it was the name of a town or the park.

JR: (OVERTALK) It's in the Sierra Mountains of California.

MEH: Okay. So you took the Greyhound bus your first trip down. How did you get there your second trip?

JR: Oh God, I had bought an old 1936 Packard touring car.

BR: No, that was a 1937.

JR: Oh, yeah, you're right. It was a '37. That's ancient. Great big – it looked like a hearse, you now. We packed ourselves into that, and Barbara had acquired two dogs? three dogs?

BR: No, I had acquired three dogs on the honeymoon, and then we kept two puppies. There was a mother and two cocker spaniel puppies, so we took the two dogs with us, which was the biggest controversy – the dog problem at Black Mountain College. I think the year we were there was – Of course there were so many powerful controversies, but this was ultra. You know. Should they be allowed in the Study Building, et cetera, et cetera. We gave away one of our dogs while we were there. But one thing that I experienced that was surprising was that the whole social science department had decamped to Oregon, and I had considered myself a social science student. So I ended up studying dance with Betty Jennerjahn and studying weaving with Anni Albers and Trude Guermonprez.

MEH: Okay, let's go back and then I'll come to what you were studying. So, Jack, you really… Once again you were not in school with your brother.

JR: Once again I was not in school with my brother. Exactly. He had decamped.

MEH: Did you have any idea what you wanted to study?

JR: I had done some writing while I was in Santa Barbara. I had pursued an interest in social science, principally anthropology, and so what I announced to the people at Black Mountain was that I would intend to continue studies in social science. But unfortunately there was almost no one there at that time. A fellow by the name of John Wallen, who had been teaching sociology there, had decamped the year before, taking quite a few students with him. Maybe Mary Miller was one of them. I don't remember. At any rate, I had the luck of – that just at that time Olson began to make an appearance. First came Edward Dahlberg, and so I just put the social science thing on the back burner for a bit and attended a couple of classes that Dahlberg taught.

MEH: What do you remember about Dahlberg's…?

JR: About Dahlberg? That he seemed to be a very unhappy man with the situation there. He was, seemed to be very uncomfortable.

MEH: What about the situation?

JR: Of the students there. There was probably about a class of twenty, and something just didn't click.

BR: Well he, I don't think he could tolerate the crudity of the accommodations.

MEH: The rustic….

BR: The rustic part. It was interesting because he just revered the ancient Athenian Greek image of shepherd kings.

JR: Yeah, you know, in his classes he would speak of the days of the shepherd-kings of Greece. He was transported into this – He was a bit like a living myth himself and living in a mythology of his own. Somehow he just didn't reach many of the students, as I recall. I mean, there may have been some who were fascinated or taken by him, but it just seemed that he came and then like a thief in the night stole away and was gone, leaving behind the residue of a recommendation that we should contact Charles Olson. At which point shortly thereafter the school did invite Olson, and he came and had just the opposite effect – an electric shock.

MEH: What do you remember… what was your first impression of Olson? Can you remember?

BR: I remember seeing him enter the Dining Hall…

JR: With Connie at his belt line.

BR: And I thought "He has his daughter with him," this little woman next to this giant. But then it turned out that it wasn't his daughter. But that was my first, the first image of him, a giant with this adorable little lady.

JR: Well, you know he gave a lecture, he gave two lectures, as I recall, maybe three. His first was on the identity, the true identity of William Shakespeare. He spent probably at least an hour proving to the satisfaction of the ages that Shakespeare was such-and-such, a person, some member of the English court. Then in the last ten minutes of his lecture totally devastated that

argument, proving that William Shakespeare was none other than William Shakespeare, who had lived, the Bard of Avon – and that was the end of that. It was a sensational presentation. The force of the man I think was what communicated. At whatever he was into or speaking of, my God, he was like a tsunami coming ashore. He bowled everything out of the way of his transmission.

MEH: He was tall, but – I never was in Olson's presence, and there are a lot of very tall people. It's not uncommon now for someone to be that tall.

BR: But he was about six foot eight.

JR: (OVERTALK) More than that.

MEH: But it had to (OVERTALK) have been more – (INTERRUPTION IN TAPING). Okay, Jack, we were talking about Olson. I mean it's hard for me to imagine his force. He was very big, but there has to have been something there besides size.

JR: Well, size certainly accompanied the force of the man. I mean he was a giant. He must have weighed easily three hundred pounds, because he was not only tall but broad. He was just a very big Swede. (LAUGHS) I remember him protesting one time, saying that he didn't… he never had the pleasure of other men of being able to walk into a bar and just enjoy himself, that the moment he walked in there'd be some small son of a bitch would walk up and want to pick a fight, just because he was big. (LAUGHS) But it was the force of the man that mattered, the way he simply sailed into everything that came his way. He not only had an opinion about everything, it seemed that he had taken the universe

apart and was putting it back together with the fury of a blacksmith dealing with hot metal. It was astonishing the way he – His second lecture there if I recall was on Moby Dick and the book that Olson had written at that time, Call Me Ishmael, which again was very – served to establish the myth that Olson himself was beginning to live, that finally surfaced in the poems, of “Maximus,” the “Maximus Poems,” “I, Maximus of Gloucester.” In his classes he didn't teach immediately. He was obligated to stay in Washington. He'd been with the Office of War Information and I think he still had government business that kept him there. He was coming down once a month, on the weekend, to see us. I remember the first real engagement – Well, he’d started us reading Pound and that was taking up enough – just letting us know where he stood in the literary world, because he had pulled in certain elements to serve his image of this mythology that he was beginning to live. But he, in coming down, left three weeks for people to be pretty much on their own. I don't know where it actually started, but somewhere along the line someone suggested that we undertake to do, to make a theatrical presentation of the poem of Garcia Lorca's, the “Lament,” “The Lament] of Ignatio Sánchez Mejias,” which – The Death of a Bullfighter who had been a great personal friend of Lorca's, and at the death of the bullfighter in the ring Lorca had written this beautiful poem which addressed the whole experience of death, the death of a friend, stages that psychologically one goes through in facing, fronting conflicting death and the denouement finally of acceptance. There was a lot of energy that got devoted to it. So we sailed into it and well, let's see –

MEH: Who is “we”?

JR: "We" was – I narrated the poem. Stan Cook did a musical score for it, Betty Jennerjahn did a dance routine for it, Don Alter and Victor Kalos did the sets, and Nick Cernovich did the lights. Sets were transparencies of bolts of cloth, transparent cloth dyed different colors, and suspended from floor to ceiling.

MEH: This was in the Dining Hall?

JR: In the Dining Hall, the “Dining” hall. The dancer came and went in various appearances through the maze. It was a wonderful experience. We had it down to what we thought it was a good presentation, and put it on for Olson the next time he came on the weekend. He tore into it and said it was much too long, you know, "cut this, "cut that," and his typical touch to things, ordering the world. But it was good what he did. It was presentable.

MEH: Did you present it again with his changes?

JR: Yeah, with his changes. Yeah, we put it on. It was very successful.

MEH: The second presentation – the first presentation just for Olson and the second for the entire community?

JR: Well, we just did a run-through for Olson, and then he shaped it up and we did a rehearsal and then put it on for the community. There were people who – some of the faculty there who actually had seen a performance in New York by José Limon and his dance troupe who had done the Lorca piece and who were quite happy with what they saw. We had a hell of a good time then. But then Olson finally came steadily. He came in residence, and the work with him then got underway. Myself personally, I went off on a tangent. One of the books that

Olson had us reading was Pound's An A B C of Economics. Somewhere in the text, I had read this reference, Pound claimed in his usual bombast that the only intelligent Teuton alive was a man named Leo Frobenius, an anthropologist. I was curious. Since I had had this background interest in anthropology, I was curious about the man, so I began to look into – I think that actually Paul Radin had been at Black Mountain one time before I had gotten there and had left a few books behind. One of them was a book of Frobenius. It was called The Childhood of Man. Also Paideuma: A Theory of Culture. I read that and was hooked by – the imagination of this man is what caught me. Anthropology had always left an unsatisfactory taste in my mouth with its attempts at being so scientific and structured, or it seemed to me that it was at a stage that the imagination served far better. So, with that I remember – I found that you could get books from the Library of Congress by request. We had a German student there who had come over, and there were a lot of the German faculty, of course, the Bauhaus faculty. So I was getting things from the Library of Congress that were actually in German, and had to request people to translate for me. So I spent a lot of time pursuing that interest. Meantime, I was also writing. I think I fell under the sway of Olson's whole concept of not just writing but the energy that he was projecting into the whole social milieu of the time. But Olson was never – he never bought me as a writer. He always insisted that I had a far more scholarly turn. But I certainly enjoyed his classes.

MEH: That first year, Olson – '48-'49, Olson was a real focus in terms of your studying?

JR: Yeah.

MEH: Yeah. That year he was coming for one long weekend each month to the college from Washington. Did he like leave people with things to read in the interim? Or was it basically just –

JR: Oh, yeah. Yeah, he had the weekend of intense classes and left us with plenty to do in the meantime. I think some of the energy that he generated was the reason why that little Lorca thing came to be. To me it was testament to the creative energy that he brought into the atmosphere there that produced that.

MEH: What other courses did you take that first year, do you remember?

JR: At that time, I was doing the anthropological work and ancient history and so forth just as a kind of tutorial just on my own pretty much and with reference back to Olson if I wanted guidance. I don't think I used anybody else. I took a bookbinding class from Johanna Jalowetz, which was a delight because the woman herself was such a delightful person. She, she was just for me the summation of European culture with her graciousness and gentleness and strength. She was probably the easiest one of all the Bauhaus faculty for me to relate to. I was never able to relate to Josef Albers. He seemed like a very complicated man to me. He was not at ease socially, at least as far as I was concerned. There was something always a little bit aloof. Very intense and very focused on his role as a mentor and leader and teacher and very intent on the success of the whole Black Mountain venture.

MEH: A couple of other faculty – I'll just raise the names that – What about Anni Albers and Trude Guermonprez?

JR: Trude stayed very much to herself when she was there. Certainly a wonderful presence. Anni, of course – Barbara was studying weaving, handweaving, with Anni and so I had occasion to see Anni now and then. I had great admiration for her. She was for my sense much warmer and more easily, more easy to relate to, than Josef. But I don't know, of the other faculty that were there –

MEH: What about Max Dehn? He was away that year.

JR: No, Max Dehn had died about the time we were –

MEH: No, he died in '52. The first year you were there he was still there, but he was away that year. He was teaching elsewhere (OVERTALK).

JR: – because I don't remember his presence at all.

MEH: What about Natasha Goldowski or Madame Goldowski?

JR: Well, Natasha came I guess well somewhere midway and immediately began giving classes in –

BR: Cybernetics.

JR: Well, she, yeah she eventually got around to introducing Norbert Wiener's book, Cybernetics, to the community and gave a series of very potent lectures regarding his work. I attended those and was very much taken by her insistence that Wiener represented a tremendous breakthrough into the flowering of science into the psychological realm and therefore into the political and social et cetera et cetera.

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

I could never go along with that at all, the concept. I thought that Wiener's idea of drawing the sciences together so that they could share the common ground

was an excellent idea, but his image that this realm of thought was a little [literal?] reproduction of the way the human mind functioned, I could never buy it and to this day cannot. So that all the jargon about a computer imitating mental processes just to me just will never happen. A computer is two numbers, zero and one. It always has only one choice to make, between two items. The human mind has always at least three. So, a computer, it'll never catch up. I think the work that I did with the Frobenius studies was probably the most important thing that happened to me that year. That and – Weren't we there for the whole summer?

BR: [AFFIRMATIVE].

MEH: The summer that Olson came. Woelffer was there, and Fuller came back.

JR: That's right. Fuller and Cage.

MEH: Not that summer.

BR: The Boston Symphony – there were a lot of members that came.

JR: Oh yeah, there was –

BR: (OVERTALK) chamber musicians.

MEH: Bodky was there.

JR: Bodky was there, and he was instrumental in bringing down a group of musicians, I think all from the Boston Symphony, to constitute a small orchestra that was representative of the type of orchestra that played during Bach's life. They came down and they put on several concerts of Bach's music, which was tremendously wonderful. One thing that sticks in my mind. It was summer, and the hall, you remember, was right at the edge of the lake. As each movement

would succeed the other, with a pause in between, you'd hear this chorus of bullfrogs croaking right at the edge of the lake. Then would come the music and then the interlude for the bullfrogs.

MEH: The bullfrog interlude.

JR: And wasn't Redford there that summer? Redford, the archaeologist who came from Chicago. He had done that dig, that excavation, at the town in Israel, the Fertile Crescent, a little town called Jarmo. He had established it as the – No that was later. That was later. (OVERTALK)

BR: His name wasn't (OVERTALK)

JR: That was a the time of Olson's New Sciences of Man kick. That was the second time we were there. Yeah, I got mixed up.

MEH: When you're there at two different periods, it's difficult to keep the times separate. In terms of just the community as a whole, the college community, what was your first real impression of it? Had you been to any other school for college at that point?

JR: Well, I'd been to the University of Santa Barbara, and I started off – Even before the War I'd had a year of college at Long Beach – City College, where I'd had my first courses in writing and public speaking and anthropology and so on. The difference between anything I'd experienced before – Of course, I'd created an image too of what it would be like to go to a place like UCLA, and I knew I wanted no part of that. It was tremendously important for me to find a place where I felt some sort of receptacle for my own individual personality, my own individual wants and needs and so forth, so that as an individual I could

not just express myself but be in relationship with other people at the same level, so there would be – Of course, Black Mountain was exactly that. The general feeling of being there was just one of such intensity. My God, there didn't seem to be a day that went by without something and usually many somethings were happening. Of course, you paid a price for that intensity as well. It was strange because it was not competitive in the normal sense of the word, at least not in my experience. It wasn't competition that drove anyone there. Discovery I think was what drove everyone. I remember – Almost anyone in being there initially – The first big interrogation that you faced was "What do you do?" It was not a negative thing; it was a very positive interrogation. It was important, all of a sudden, what you did. If you hadn't felt it was important before, you (LAUGHS) went back into your study and figured out just exactly why it was important and then you went out and said so. So that every student was drawn into this intensity somehow. You just could not stay outside of it, even if you wanted. The whole experience of being there was just a marvel. I know after we left the second time and came out here to California and to rejoin the rest of the human race, it was a bore. I mean we couldn't believe that nothing was happening here.

MEH: What did you do on the Work Program? Did you have a particular specialty of assignment?

JR: The first time? I don't know. Oh, I went up and did a little work on the tobacco barns that turned out to be the favorite chore of – Dan and Fee Dawson, I think,

did the lion's share of that work. Barbara and I ended up being the butter makers, responsible for hand-churning the milk that came from the barn.

BR: Do you want water? [TO JACK]

JR: And making butter out of it. That was kind of fun. Oh, I don't know, helped out here and there during the harvest, gathering corn, and shucking corn and so on.

MEH: Where did you live?

JR: The first time? We lived in North Lodge, wasn't it?

BR: Yeah. Yeah, we had two big rooms.

JR: That was the second time, after Kate was born where we had the two rooms. We had one room right in the middle of the dorm. It looked out toward Bodky's place. The Roundhouse.

MEH: Did you have a study in the Studies Building?

JR: Yeah. Yeah, on the upper floor. (LAUGHS) I had a custom of – we used to love to hike, and I found a trail up to the saddle – I think it was the mountains in the back of the college. There was a trail that led up to the saddle at the top where there'd been an old settler's cabin and there were still a couple of apple trees there. In the season there were some wild strawberries that grew on the way up. After discovering those apple trees, when the apples came ripe, I took a gunnysack along and brought back a gunnysack full of them and found a great big crock and filled the crock outside my study door so everybody could come by and get an apple when they wanted. My other memory of the Studies Building was as a hangover from my parachute days in the Marine Corps, I

favored wearing boots. Nick Cernovich's study was just below, a floor below mine, and when I would walk along the wooden corridor, I guess the boots would produce this staccato that was annoying the hell out of him. He accosted me one day at the Dining Hall and he says, "You know, you walk like a son of a bitch!" (LAUGHS)

MEH: What were meals like at Black Mountain?

JR: Well, we were dependent a great deal on farm produce, and I think the ingenuity of the two wonderful cooks, Malrey and Cornelia, went a long way to helping out. They turned out some pretty interesting stuff. The principal thing with meals was the – The diet was always relative to what was available on the farm, what could be afforded, which meant usually meat maybe once a week, rarely twice a week and usually served on Saturday nights. The custom was everybody would get dressed up for the Saturday night dinner, and you would never want to be late because there wasn't that much meat to go around.

MEH: What did you basically eat on nonmeat meal days?

JR: Well, vegetables from the farm, as I recall. I remember we had a language teacher there, Flola Shepard, who came from Antioch I think, who came to us and was taken onto the faculty. She was put in charge of the diet. After a month or so of her being there, maybe even longer, people became aware that we were eating – what was it? String beans or okra or some damn vegetable again and again and again, and little else. Meals seemed to be thinning out, as far as the quality and quantity as well. Finally someone took her to task for it. She said – well, she confessed that her criteria was the menu of the average Russian

soldier (LAUGHS), his daily ration, and that's what we were being held to at that point. Corn, of course, when it was in season, and root vegetables and so on. The principal thing in the Dining Hall, of course, was with the meals, There was great conversation, the way it drew people together, because we all ate together for the most part, and table were six or eight and students mixed with faculty. It was just a marvelous exchange going on continually. It was far more than just being a leveling device. It was an opportunity to gage the extent to which any artistic or scholastic discipline penetrated the actual lives of both faculty and students, what it meant in the life, because here were people just sitting around a table at meals discussing with each other. It was so enlightening to – You saw what really mattered in people's lives, so it wasn't just a matter of someone was teaching something over here and being a social person over there. You saw the effects of being an artist or being a musician or being a writer or whatever in a person's life. That's why the intensity developed, because the intensity was both personal in the sense of being carried by a given person who could inspire you or you could inspire in turn, but their work as well.

MEH: You had been to colleges in cities before. What do you think was the effect of Black Mountain's being as isolated as it was and in such a landscape?

JR: Well, that was always a problem. It was a problem in the sense that it was really quite apparent to us that we were not – We were such an unknown quantity. No one could understand – that is local people had a pretty difficult time trying to understand what the hell was going on. These strange people –

beards, sandals, casual dress, strange accents. Then, of course, we broke all the rules at the time of the state of North Carolina. We had an Oriental student Ruth Asawa and we had strange visitors coming to us from around the country dropping in, folksingers, musicians, and dramatists who would come by to look and be with us for a while. We were not understood. Of course, as a result, there were some strong feelings here and there from the outside community. For Black Mountain itself, there was an ambivalence. It was as though – someone put I think one time that the place had never been able to decide whether it was a community that contained a school or that it was a school that was a community.

MEH: But just from the perspective of Black Mountain itself, the college itself, how do you think it was affected by its location in a rural environment instead of like a city? How do you think that affected the community itself?

JR: Well, it made life a great deal more real in the sense that it stripped away all the detritus that usually is characteristic. Dress was never a consideration. The way you dressed was at the mercy of the way you felt. Your ideas of dress. Being in the rural environment of that kind, where you were called on to participate in the physical running of the school, the physical maintenance of the place, gave a totally different perspective. You weren't secreted into some little niche where things were done for you and so forth. You did for yourself, so it was a contribution to – I think it went a long way to helping dispel any aspect of pretense that might develop as a result of – Like I don't remember ever being conscious of who had – who came from wealthy families, who had a lot of

money, who didn't. It didn't seem to matter, and it rarely became an issue, as I recall, at least in my experience.

MEH: Were you aware at that first year, '48-'49, of the conflicts within the school that eventually led to the Albers leaving and Bodky, Schlesinger?

JR: Well, I think the first time I became aware of the conflict was that summer session when some of the – I think it was – correct me if I'm wrong, but I think it was Joe Fiore, who made contact with some of the painters in the so-called New York School of Abstract Expressionism – de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Motherwell and people – and it led to a visit that summer. That to me was the first – What had happened, what seemed to be the case was that a lot of the young painters had begun to pay much more attention to what was going on in New York than to what Albers was feeding them at the school. Albers was a splendid teacher, and he had a coterie of people who were devoted to him. But there was also a new element that was paying a great deal of attention to what else was going on, and it was on fire at that time. I think Albers began to sense it. The conflict – I don't know – I know that Albers and Olson that first year and that summer – Olson fired Albers' imagination tremendously. I remember watching the two of them talk after one of Olson's lectures. I had never seen Albers so excited, so it must have been – The rift began, I think, with the idea of this, the need to change what was happening in painting and sculpture, in the arts, to go over to something else. That as I say began with some of the students.

MEH: After that first year you stayed for the summer of 1949, when Olson was there and Woelffer and Buckminster Fuller came down with some students from the Institute of Design?

JR: Yes.

MEH: Did you have any interest in what Fuller was doing?

JR: I was fascinated by some of the things he was doing. I had begun to be aware of an interest in myself in architecture, as I had done more and more research into anthropology and archaeology. House forms, church forms, et cetera, had become very important to me. When I saw what Fuller was up to with his Dymaxion House, architecturally I was appalled, frankly. I couldn't get behind that at all. But the man, some of his ideas, the fascinating things that he was involved in, concepts – I attended every lecture that he ever gave there and pursued with some of his students. They set up some strange looking devices to illustrate some of his concepts of fluid geometry, and these were fascinating to me. So, this was all very abstract stuff. As I say when we – they did a little model of the Dymaxion structure that summer, and I don't know, I was more amused by Fuller and his twelve young disciples that he brought with him. He was such a strange figure in any way. The man apparently never slept. You'd see him late into the night. His lectures would go on till midnight, until everybody fell asleep practically, trying to stay with him. He was just a bundle of raw energy. But when you would hit the breakfast table the next morning, there would be Fuller there with his – he would already have condensed the day's news, the morning's news, into mimeographed sheets that he passed around to

everyone. You wondered if it must have taken him all night to hear the broadcast and reduce them to – That was the strangest, strangest thing. He was an exciting person to be around. There's no question. But, as I say, actually I could never go where he was intending. His concept of asking how much a house weighed, plotting that against his devices where he could house the entire world in five years if they gave him just some of the munitions factories to mass produce his things.

MEH: How did Olson and Fuller relate that summer?

JR: I don't remember. I don't remember. I really don't.

MEH: What about Olson and Woelffer?

JR: Woelffer? The painter.

MEH: He was teaching painting.

JR: God, all I remember about him is that he lived in a place right near us, and it seemed like the man never did anything but smoke and paint. All night long you'd see the lightbulb burning in his place, and the next morning the whole floor would be littered with – I think he was painting on paper or something at the time. My God, the place was just littered with paintings. He was a nice guy. Crazy (LAUGHS). By that, I mean simply that he was sort of a strange one and subject to wonderful fits of enthusiasm and intensity.

MEH: So, why did you leave at the end of 1949?

JR: Well, Barbara has never forgiven me for leaving because I literally took her away from something that was really very good for her. I had gotten to a point in my own interests where I – with the anthropology I wanted very much to – I felt

in order to further what I was interested in I needed to go to a place where I was in – well, I needed to go to the Southwest, where the surviving remnants of these ancient cultures were still extant, and there were departments of anthropological study that were in direct connection with a lot of this. I had wanted to stay at Black Mountain and study there and was very excited about the idea because an anthropologist, a bona fide genuine anthropologist by the name of Paul Leser, had come to us from some other Eastern school and had been accepted on the faculty there at Black Mountain. But I approached him to take me on as his student, and he said he wasn't prepared, that he felt he couldn't undertake to deal with a serious student in anthropology because his whole library was tied up somewhere overseas or it had been lost in transit. Whatever it was, he was in transit himself and had only just newly arrived and was getting newly acquainted and appeared to be interested in staying but he just sort of wasn't willing to accept the responsibility, I guess, of taking on a full-time serious student. So that meant that I didn't have an option to stay there because there was no one else that I could go on with, and that was my interest at that time. I had written a paper – god, talk about the arrogance of the youthful student, ha! – I had written a paper which I titled "The Anthropology of Anthropology," and it took about twenty-five pages to declare that “anthropology,” as a practice and as a concept was culturally conditioned, and therefore was inevitably subjective and could never quality as a scientific discipline.

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

MEH: So you left at the end of the '49 summer session?

JR: Oh, yes.

MEH: And where did you go to?

JR: To the University of New Mexico at Albuquerque.

MEH: You were on the GI Bill?

JR: Yes. So was Barbara.

MEH: Barbara was on too. Okay.

JR: Yeah, Barbara had served in both the U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy. I brought up the rear with the U.S. Marine Corps. We were being pensioned off in our education. Yeah, I went there because of the reasons I gave, the wanting to study. I wanted to take the ideas that I had been given and had gleaned from my studies of Frobenius in his work, which I felt were very revolutionary because they were so tremendously imaginative in their attempts to understand the soul of man in his development and the spirit of man and the relationship between that spirit and the material culture that anthropologists seemed to be spending all of this goddam time tracking, uselessly. So I felt I wanted to be with the environment of what was being done as anthropology at that time and archaeology. So that was the University of New Mexico and out there in the heart of the Wild West and Indian country. We had a wonderful year there. I was almost – I took a great raft of anthropology courses and met tremendously important anthropologists like Frank Hibben and Leslie Speer (PH), and it all came to nothing. I could not digest what they were dishing out. It was meaningless to me. I gave the paper that I had written, which was a very

clumsy work, I agree, but the kernel of the idea was very simple, and that is to the effect that the study that we call anthropology was contained in culture, therefore it was acculturated. It could never be a science. It was at the service of the thinking of a given group of people who had built a given structure of what it meant to be human, and therefore these were the concepts which surface as anthropology. So it was a very simple idea. Why I think I had such difficulty with it was it was clumsily written. It was overbearing in the way it presented itself. I finally got a geology professor to read it, and he thought it was just wonderful. (UNINTEL WORD) What he saw in it I have no idea. He encouraged me to take the paper over to the philosophy department, which I did, and found them involved principally in the philosophy of number schemes and the like at that time. So total altering of course. Barbara had lined herself up with a dance teacher there by the name of Elizabeth Waters, who had been a student of Martha Graham's in New York.

BR: Hanya Holm.

JR: Hanya Holm? I had also included a writing class. So, I think I drew an F in at least four courses in the anthropology that I was taking and put all my weight into the writing. We did a little performance. What did we do? Oh, we took a couple of Lorca poems. I narrated and Barbara danced, and a young fellow who we'd met there from the Music Department did a score for piano. So we managed to have some fun that year. We had found a magnificent place to live. It was the oldest adobe house in the entire Albuquerque area. It belonged to one of the early Spanish families, the Iristari family. It was a ruin, but there were

still several rooms that were – So we lived there and at another place also called Corrales. I was beginning to write again, a little bit. But I was very despondent about the anthropology studies. Finally, toward the end of the year – Oh, no, we had the summer in Taos. When school ended, we went up to Taos for the summer, had a great summer there. While I was there, I learned from one of the people that I had known who was in anthropology there at Albuquerque, who had gone down to Mexico, I heard back from him that he had been studying with a man by the name of Robert Barlow.

BR: You're wrong. We encountered that guy at Black Mountain College.

MEH: (OVERTALK) Who was it?

JR: Whatever. The decision then was to go to Mexico.

MEH: Now were you aware that Olson had been in the Yucatan at that point?

JR: Yeah. We were in touch with Charles. We had corresponded. Dan went – Before that or after that? Dan went after Olson. But anyhow I learned that Charles was going down to Lerma, Campeche. So we were in Mexico City at the time that he was over there for a while. We were there for almost two years in Mexico City, and I went to Mexico City College Writing Center, or first of all Mexico City College, studying English literature. Principally, it was just a way of being down there. We had a wonderful time meeting not Mexicans so much as a handful of young Spaniards. These were the sons of expatriate Spanish families who had fled under Franco, Franco's regime, and had come to Mexico City and had taken up teaching jobs. The young men (the sons) had gotten jobs as teachers. We got to know four or five of them, all of them writers. So my

whole interest at that time swung over to writing. Barbara was still weaving. We had our first child there. Our daughter, Megan, was born in Mexico City at the time. We had a very good life there in a lot of ways. Then word came finally from a visit from Dan that Black Mountain was in a hell of an upheaval at that time, a struggle between Charles and Natasha that was going on. Hazel Larsen, I guess, was a part of that picture. I've forgotten. I was being invited to come back and take over the Work Program, in such a position that I would actually have a vote. So, in other words it was a political thing. Although I didn't really see it at the time, that was the underlying reason. What I was looking at, and Barbara also, was that it was an opportunity to go back to Black Mountain again.

MEH: Do you think that really Olson was seeing you as a political ally if you went back?

JR: I was being used as a political ally. Yeah. Which I didn't hesitate to do. It never struck me that way. The word "politics" I think has always been a dirty word to me. I saw it really as a question of support and given the battle lines that had been drawn. My support was really with Charles.

MEH: What do you think was the issue then?

JR: As I gathered, Natasha had wanted to push the school toward this whole new idea of cybernetics and give it a more scientific orientation, whereas Charles had begun his big image of the New Sciences of Man, as he called it. He wanted to – What Norbert Wiener was doing with the formal sciences, Charles wanted to do with the arts and social studies and so on. It was a grand image

that had developed. At any rate, I had had an offer of staying in Mexico and participating in a Rockefeller grant for young writers, but the Black Mountain thing looked better at that time. So, off we went. We came back to the States and made our way back again to Black Mountain.

MEH: Was that '52 or '51, do you remember?

JR: Oh gee – ‘51 or ‘52.

MEH: I can check the dates –

JR: I don't really re- – It seemed to me that we were down – It must have been '52, because we went down to Mexico in '50 and we were there for almost two years, so it would have been early '52 when we came back? Or late '51?

MEH: What about the college? Had it changed at all?

JR: Hmm. It was smaller. There were fewer students. Olson had had a tremendous impress. He had built this literary edifice of the Black Mountain Writers Group – Fee Dawson and I think Victor Kalos was part of it at that time, Nick, Nick, you know, Cernovich. I don't remember all. There was a whole series of these young men that had been with him for the, I guess, three years since Barbara and I had been gone. Two years. It was pretty intense, what was going on. God, I don't know. I'm really forgetting a lot. A lot of times, the two experiences run into each other, or run over each other.

MEH: But you went back to be director of the Work Program.

JR: Yeah, I did, and I felt always that that was a – Olson had this image, when he spoke to me, of developing a whole new campus. He had this grand idea of creating a school that would be principally for people who had achieved a

certain level of accomplishment in the arts but were not yet ready to become professional. This would be a proving ground for their talents, and they would in turn draw on fully professional people from all walks who would be drawn to Black Mountain to do their work, professional work, and to make themselves available to the young semi-professional students. So, in other words instead of just going there to study music, you would have in residence a symphony orchestra and its director and composing students and musician students would work in that direction. You would have a press, the Black Mountain Press. You would publish your own stuff, so the whole act of writing would be – there would be writers like Olson and Creeley and so on there as the professional and prepared to usher in new young writers and publishing them and so on. That was the kind of image that he had that would go throughout – You would have a dance company, for example. This was what he saw, as I understood it, for the direction that he wanted the school to go in. I was drawn into that (imaginatively) to envision converting what facilities we had to serve those ends. I was to take a look at the architectural element of the school to see what could be redirected and reused to serve the ends of this larger thing that he had in mind and also to indicate what kind of new accommodations architecturally we would need. Not to design architecturally but simply to try to envision and document what kind of a physical plant would be needed to handle all of this. At the same time, I was being asked to try to keep up with this falling down campus. For Christ's sake, everything was in a state of disrepair. Furnaces weren't working, cesspools weren't doing their job, windows were broken, roofs

were leaking, and on and on. Eventually what I was trying to do was to marshal people together and to do some of this stuff. At the same time there were no funds available to accomplish hardly even the most minimum standards of maintenance. The school finally took on a maintenance man, a local fellow, a real nice old guy. I don't know. It got to be a very difficult situation. I felt that for one thing, I was being asked with regard to this new campus thing to do something that was really beyond – I had no adequate experience that would prepare me to undertake that, and I felt that was very – It would have been presumptuous of me to have tried that. It was presumptuous of him to have asked me, to have put me in that position. When I finally encountered the brutal truth of the school's maintenance "budget," it was a final blow. The school had an account at the local Black Mountain hardware in town, and I remember going in there one day to get materials and sign for them and so forth and being told that they couldn't accept my signature anymore, that the account was still there but I was not authorized to sign it any longer, which generated tremendous resentment because I felt so – behind in everything anyhow. So much of the stuff that was being done I was doing myself. There was hardly anything that you could organize. There was the normal range of things for students to do, the farming, the kitchen, and stoking coal in the boilers and things like that. That was getting done. But the rest of it, trying to keep up with failing stuff all over the campus, was – Of course one thing that had happened -- it was really such a tragedy -- was that one night during a concert, suddenly everything was broken up. It had been discovered that the house way at the far

end of the property that Joe and Mary Fiore had been living in had caught fire. [JR NOTE: It was later confessed by Wes Huss (who shared the house) that he had failed to check and add proper amount of water to the furnace when he fueled it before he left for concert. Furnace then ran out of water, overheated and set fire.] Everybody went roaring up there and we pulled out the hoses to try to put the fire out. The fire had gone a long way already. It was just totally engulfed in flames. Joe almost lost his life trying to go in and rescue his paintings and Mary's writing. But anyway, we were pulling these hoses out, turning the water faucets on but none of the hoses worked. They were full of holes. We just had to stand there and watch the whole thing go up in smoke and ashes. I felt personally responsible. I felt that that should have been one of the things that fell under the heading that I should have been responsible for and had not. There had been past fire drills. I don't know. It was just one more, one more thing that just ate at me, that it was all wrong. How it ever came down, I don't remember. I became very angry and I wrote a very angry and adolescent response, I think, and tendered my resignation. At that time then, because I really had nothing else that I was – I was torn with the idea of just getting the hell out and leaving. Then David and Karen – Karen Karnes and David Weinrib – David came to me and said that he had been wanting to have a studio and was moving into ceramic sculpture and away from the pots, and he said he had five hundred bucks and what could we do with that. About that time suddenly had come together in me that amounted to a beginning interest in architectural elements and forms. I had never really worked with my hands all

that much, that is creatively. So I took it on and spent a series of months building David his studio and an outdoor structure that could serve as – they were going to have a pot seminar thing for the summer. I don't know, I think – So I built that whole thing. For me it was an exciting thing. I pried granite slabs off of outcrops up above the farm and rolled them down to use for a floor. I used as many natural materials as I could, just had a wonderful creative experience for myself. Well, when I got all through with it and turned it over to David, I hadn't realized that what I had created was in itself a kind of sculpture. Of course, this is a man who wanted to go in there and do his sculpture, and in it all he could do was to – He told me that he picked up handfuls of dried clay and just went around the room throwing it at these polished walls and dirtying up the floor with clods of clay, anything to destroy the overwhelming presence of this damn room and turn it into a place where he could work, which he did. Of course, I couldn't forgive him and he couldn't forgive me, but he finally a few years later sent me – I don't know whether he sent me a drawing or a photograph of the whole business, as a forgiveness, which was very nice of him. Because I saw at that time what I had done. The door that served the studio – I had this beautifully hand-carved handle of a Japanese-type lock, a Japanese-style lock, and he took ahold of it and just wrenched it off and threw it away, which of course cut deeply but I was able finally to come to understand what I'd done and why he was right to do what he did. But at any rate, that brought an end to my activity at BMC. The last relation with Charles was him suggesting that I head up a coalition of craftspeople, some of whom were there

at the school, some of whom could be brought there, and set up some kind of a situation up in the woodshop or wherever to turn out hand designed and handmade crafts to be marketed in Asheville and such like, just for a financial contribution to the school because by that time the school was just down on its knees financially. I guess Paul Williams made some effort to come to the school's aid. At any rate, I was not receptive. I felt for myself that what I needed was to get the hell out into a marketplace where I could butt heads with using, forcing my own creative interests up against the cold world out there. So, that meant leaving the school. I did. I left, came out to California. I brought Barbara out shortly after that.

MEH: There are a couple of questions and then we'll come back so that we can go through what you've done since. You were there in the fall of '52. Do you have any particular memories of the pottery seminar that fall?

JR: Just – The pottery seminar for me principally was Peter Voulkos.

MEH: Now I'm talking about the Japanese potters.

JR: Oh, Wildenhain and Hamada and Leach were there. No, I don't remember much.

BR: We weren't there. (OVERTALK) We weren't there when Hamada was there, or Leach, or – (OVERTALK)

JR: We weren't there when that group came.

MEH: But you were there the next summer when Voulkos was there.

BR: Yeah.

JR: When the semi-pros came through.

BR: They were pros.

JR: Well, compared to Hamada.

MEH: What do you remember about Voulkos? You said you remembered him particularly.

JR: Voulkos? Oh, just what a striking person the man was. Other people coming to Black Mountain as strangers, would take a taxi in from town or something, or call up the school usually and ask where in the hell we were. There would be a fol-de-rol about them coming out, getting to the school. I was working down at the pot shop at the time that Peter arrived. I see this taxi going out this dusty country road and stopping at the far gate of the cow pasture. This figure gets out with a little satchel and comes up the path, threading his way through the cattle and trying to find – because he'd seen some structures and the Studies Building and the pot shop – threading his way directly up. The pot shop was exactly where he came. He didn't come through the front gate to the Administration Building or the Dining Hall. He came through the cow pasture right to the pot shop. It so struck me. It was sort of the signature of the man. That was his kind of – That was the way he approached his craft. It was wonderful to have known him. I designed and built a pot wheel that summer for him. I built it for general use, and he took to it. He was probably the only one that liked it at all, would make any use of it. It had a kind of a bizarre design. But that's –

[END OF SIDE 1. AUDIOCASSETTE 2. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2]

MEH: We've got about five minutes. I'm watching carefully. Okay. That summer – Go ahead –

JR: I was just going to say that I remember watching Peter work, and it was inspirational to watch. He was throwing huge pots at the time, pots that were bigger than practically anything else that was going on. I remember somebody asking him once why he had chosen to build such – to make such large ceramic pieces. He said well, in his introduction to ceramics, he had seen pictures of pots and that's how big they looked. So, here he was building things that no one else could practically bring off and he had found a way of doing it. But it was just so refreshing, the energy, the simplicity of that energy that he brought to his work. I remember the first firing of some of his work that he had thrown that summer. He was doing these delicate, a lot of just delicate Grecian forms also. There was one particular pot that was just so beautiful, and he had incised it as well as glazed it. The firing was over and the batch was brought out, apparently the pot was a little too thin-walled and it cooled too quickly and it shattered. He scooped it up and threw it in a G.I. can. I very carefully later on, went back and extracted every last little piece and glued it all back together again. Do you remember that pot, Barbara?

BR: It was lost in an earthquake. The only thing that was lost was that Voulkos pot, and I have a shard from the second pot we had from Peter up there, from the second earthquake.

JR: But that was – There was a young fellow named McKenzie, and I liked him a great deal. There was something so direct and honest about this man also. But that's the best of my memory there.

MEH: Do you have any memories from that summer of the Cunningham Dance Company?

JR: Oh yeah, watching Merce dance, yeah, and some Cage concerts, and David Tudor there at the piano. I could never get very interested in Cage's music. I simply couldn't understand anything about what he was doing or why. Merce's dancing was quite different. There was something so elemental in the dances he performed that communicated, and I felt was just really a very powerful art as he practiced it. But no, as I say, I just wasn't able to make much use of the experience of Cage's music. I mentioned that doing that Lorca, the Lament, earlier, and this young student, Stan Cook, a musical student who did a musical score for the performance. Stan had heard of Cage's prepared piano technique at that time, and so that become the core of the pieces that he composed for the performance, tying, you know, slugs and washers and combs and whatnot into the strings of the piano so that you get these funny sounds. That worked. That worked. It was still music as I understood and loved it.

MEH: So why don't we now, what I'm going to do, why don't we give Barbara –

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]