

Interviewee: RICHARD AMERO
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. Richard, how did you come to be a student at Black Mountain College?

RA: I had just gotten out of the army after World War II, and I wanted to go on with higher education. I was perhaps a very confused GI, without any real thought about my future. I did have a friend from Gloucester who had gone to Black Mountain for a semester. His name was Addison Bray, and he told me many glorious stories about his adventures, and I surmised that it was a rather carefree place. I thought it would be suitable for me as an experience, and there was also a problem of credits. At the time I don't think I had the credits to get into a bona fide college that offered degrees, because I didn't take a college preparatory course in high school. With Addison's advice, I applied to admission at Black Mountain and presented an application which described my hopes and my dreams and my background up to that time. At that period in my life I was intensely interested in literature, and I did a lot of experimental writing, improvised writing. I thought that Black Mountain would be a place that would at least get me in the door towards higher education, which is exactly what it did. I

went during that 1946-47 period when I understand there was a great influx of GIs, and the enrollment, which was really quite small according to the standards of bigger colleges, but the enrollment at the time was about ninety. For Black Mountain that was considered a very big enrollment. Also, I think there was that great contrast between the regimentation and the discipline of the military and Black Mountain, which would represent the other extreme. I was quite delighted to find myself in a place where rules weren't quite as rigid. Perhaps at Black Mountain they were more unconscious than codified. But I think I was, along with every other student there that I actually came in contact with, a very naive, young, inexperienced person just waiting to see what my teachers would give me and what the world would give me later.

MEH: You felt like even after being in service you were still a naive, young person?

RA: That's an interesting question. The GIs certainly have been through so many graphic, violent, and sordid things. Certainly I knew what other people did. After all, both in England and in France or Belgium, where I spent most of my time during the war period, what we call "morals" were very lax. People knew or felt that they were only going to live for the moment, and that there was no future for any of them unless they by some miracle, happened to survive. So, I was exposed to an enormous amount of sexual promiscuity which I didn't indulge in myself, and that's probably

what kept me naive. I arrived at Black Mountain a virginal type, and I think I remained virginal, but frustrated, during the two semesters I was there.

MEH: Where are you from?

RA: I'm from Gloucester, Massachusetts, which was a really wonderful community. It's an artist's community as well as a practical, hardworking fishermen's community. The two extremes seemed to come together in a rather remarkable understanding way. I think the artists appreciated the fishermen, perhaps more than the fisherman appreciated the artists. But there was a nice collaboration there, a nice feeling that the two extremes could rub shoulders with one another without any animosity or friction.

MEH: Was your family fishermen?

RA: No. My own family – and after all everyone in Gloucester was not a fisherman – but my own family was French Canadian, from Nova Scotia, and the hereditary profession of my father and grandfather, great-grandfather going on back was carpenters. So, that was a profession that my own father was very anxious to break, this continuing tradition, so he kept me as far away from the tools -- carpenter tools -- as he could. I never picked up the knack of doing -- building things -- which was quite a surprise at Black Mountain because I think one of the ways in which I got in was when I put on my application that I had a father as a carpenter. I think they expected me to come there and do all sorts of work that had been waiting just for someone like me supposedly to arrive and

do. And the shock was that I was completely incompetent. (LAUGHS)

Couldn't do any of it!

MEH: Do you remember your first impression of the college when you arrived?

How did you get there? By car?

RA: By train. I don't have that much of a recall. I think the train in those days would stop at Black Mountain and not at Asheville, and I'm sure that they had word of my coming because I didn't either take a cab or hitchhike to the campus. The young people who were there were all told to be very good to the newcomers, and they had organized almost a reception committee. I recall that I was placed in the hands of one of the students – I think in this case it was a young girl – and was quickly told what the rules or the ropes were. And I caught on pretty fast. Living in the dorm was somewhat similar to my army experience, because once again we were in a great big room with all sorts of cots all around us, and in our particular dorm or lodge or cabin — I think it was a lodge — they were all males. And then the twin cottage, I think they were all females. So there was a segregation of the sexes, except when we got to the Study Building, and there I believe the sexes were allowed to intermingle, but I think there must have been some rule about leaving at a certain hour of the evening because I don't believe anyone slept there overnight. I think what probably attracted me most, as an initial experience, would have been the scenery.

MEH: You mean when you got there, the thing that hit you most.

RA: I think that when I saw the lake and the mountains and the greenery, it was a little overwhelming. In those instances when I've been really impressed up to that time by scenery, certainly Black Mountain was commensurate to a reaction I had at Biarritz, France, when I saw the ocean and the coast. It was fascinating, and it seemed to bring out something in me, a response of rapture and appreciation. It was so spontaneous that I don't think it was — so much of what I do has been conditioned by what I've read, but in both in Biarritz and Black Mountain I think the scenery was there first and the reflections came later.

MEH: Who was teaching literature?

RA: M.C. Richards and Dave Corkran. Well, Corkran wasn't primarily a literature teacher. He did teach a course called "American Civilization," which delved at great length into the writings of American authors. I think that usually at colleges — and Black Mountain is no different from other progressive colleges in that respect — there are some teachers that stand out because of their vitality, their personality, and their empathy with the students, and this was true of my relationship with Dave Corkran. He brought me out. And also with the help of small classes that consisted mainly of discussion and talk and reaction, both to what we were reading and to one another. The teacher, I think, tended to be on the side, stirring things up and watching it go. In that sense, the Black Mountain teacher was not a traditional teacher who was an instructor first. I think Dave and M.C., and Rondthaler — they were my primary teachers — taught from

that, from the viewpoint of roundtable discussions. I won't say it went back to Socrates and his constant questioning, but it was an attempt to get us out of ourselves, out of all the pretenses and falsehoods and notions of what was expected, so that we could come to personal original conclusions, sometimes absurd, sometimes quite astute. I remember also John Wallen. John Wallen, he was the psychology teacher. I was exposed to his — I won't say "influence," because I don't think Wallen ever influenced me, but I was exposed to his production and it intrigued me. I really wanted to learn psychology, and a Wallen class wasn't a class where you learned things per se, certainly not in any academic sense. You just — his intention was to try to make you see where you had deluded yourself or maybe had complexes or biases or prejudices, and that he and his group in their wholesome way would somehow wean you away from those bad influences. So, his class was more like psychotherapy (LAUGHS). I think today we call it "sensitivity training." One thing I found amusing about his class was that he had a lot of psychodrama. You were supposed to go in and act out scenarios. In one of them, he was demonstrating prejudice, and I certainly don't think I'm prejudiced, except in the sense that Wallen said everyone was prejudiced whether they wanted to acknowledge it or not. But at this particular psychodrama, I had been reading Friedrich Nietzsche and gotten all kinds of anti-Semitic ideology none of which I believe. I thought it was atrocious, but for the class I acted out the part of an intellectual who thought the Jews were

corrupting society because they taught this philosophy of meekness, which, of course, to Nietzsche was terrible, despicable. And so my approach was really intellectual, not that of say the man in the street who doesn't like Jews for any number of weird and superficial reasons. The other person who was in this drama with me was Dick Spahn. And Spahn was — oh, he was horrified at the things I was saying. Of course, his job was to take this prejudiced person and through this kind of exemplary reasoning completely transform him into a respectable, nice, wishy-washy liberal, I guess. But Spahn happened to be my roommate at the time, and I liked Dick a lot, and he said afterwards, "I hope you didn't believe any of that stuff!" (LAUGHS) And I assured him that it was all an act. But even putting an act like that makes you feel guilty afterwards, because you're doing something to your own — you're making fun of your own principles. Perhaps an actor can do it, but I found it difficult to do, or at least afterwards it was distasteful to me. So, I wasn't a Wallenite. I know that he had a special group, as so many of the other teachers did. They seemed to have people that gravitated to them and to their approach, and to their dynamic character.

Dave Corkran was a fascinating person. I think one thing that got us, as we sat in our little room with him, was watching him and his pipe. In those days I guess smoking a pipe, with all that smoke, was permissible, and we didn't worry about getting cancer or lung disease. But when Dave was always either filling or

emptying his pipe, and in between, we were talking into a blue heat. At that time — again one of these things about being a naive young person — and I don't think it was necessarily peculiar to me — in order to make ourselves known we had to pretend to be a lot more than we really were. I think in Dave's class, in order to be different from all the other students, I would take the part of a conservative, of the reactionary, because they were all — the other students seemed to be what today I guess we'd call liberated. They didn't have any — they weren't handicapped by some kind of a burden of family belief, a dogma or ecclesiastical authority that they had come with from the past. They seemed to have shaken all that off of them. I wasn't going to church at the time, but I made it known to everyone in Dave Corkran's class that I was a Roman Catholic. Corkran was delighted. I think Corkran himself was basically a conservative, and he liked to have someone almost as an ally to hold up his position. I remember a couple of the instances in his class. One was when we were talking about the candidacy of Al Smith, and I made it known in no uncertain terms that Al Smith was defeated for the presidency because he was a Roman Catholic. Whether that is entirely true or not, I'm not sure today. But I'm sure the fact that he was a Roman Catholic was an overriding influence on the part of many people who voted against him. Then another occasion, I think we had got into the Depression, and most people weren't — if they had bad experiences during the Depression and weren't willing to share it, but I was and I told everyone in the class that my father was unemployed, and we were waiting for the government, WPA, and we also went to a place where they handed out free food. So, it added a note of actuality to a

class, which is good. I think that it's much better than reading something that occurred in a book to meet people who actually went through it. But what delighted me also is I started to write in a very furious and excitable way in Dave Corkran's class, because we would get so stirred up in some of our arguments and disagreements that I would want to do a little bit more to explain my position afterwards. And I remember that I — I defended James Fennimore Cooper, who — I guess everyone had read Mark Twain's essay criticizing Cooper for all his literary faults. And I wanted it known that I still enjoyed him, and Dave was on the sidelines cheering me on because he happened to like Fennimore Cooper too. It's well to remember that Cooper was really a fashionable and very popular author of his time, even when you read, say, Tolstoy and the great novelists in Russia, you'll find that they've all read Cooper with great delight. So, perhaps today I might write about Cooper in a much more qualified way than I did at that time. Also when we got to Herman Melville and Moby Dick, I think that was my, another great experience, almost like a spiritual reawakening, because Moby Dick was certainly an enormous novel, with such a broad sweep from heaven to earth and all the extremes in between and this marvelous view both of life on the shore and what it meant, and life in the ocean and what the whale meant, both as a symbol and as an actual object. All those things stirred me up in some great inner way. Even today, if I were to be asked my favorite writers I would put Herman Melville first. So, I attribute a lot of my future development, my future interests, to Dave Corkran. I think he helped in a way to make me what I am today, certainly in intellectual levels, though I never really had any deep

person-to-person discussions with him. M.C., on the other hand – she may have been a very brilliant woman — I've read some of the comments that her students have written about her, and they're overwhelming with appreciation. I was a little skeptical about that, but I think that M.C. did have a remarkable ability of pulling together a diverse number of students and getting them all involved in some simple topic. In this case it was Shakespeare. I enjoyed my class with her I think because I enjoyed the other students more than I did M.C. (LAUGHS). I remember one time she sort of departed from the discussion time to read us an essay she had written on irony, which was based on some kind of a concept that she had gotten from Anatole France, and that she had passed this off in some previous life as either a college essay or a college thesis. Even at the time I thought it was much ado about nothing. So I wouldn't say that I disliked M.C., but her impact wasn't quite as earthshaking as was my time with Dave Corkran.

Rondthaler, who taught the course in Utopias, I have sort of a distant recollection of him. I think the Utopia class was exciting to me because we could always make some kind of a crossover to what Black Mountain was supposed to be and wasn't really because how can you make a continuous community out of what is essentially a temporary collegiate atmosphere. Though some of the students certainly tried to. In Rondthaler's class, that was the occasion when I had persuaded Faf Foster and Knute Stiles to go with me to the monastery at Gethsemane. And I wanted to go to Gethsemane because I had, while I was in the army I was toying with the idea of becoming either a priest or a monk, and I

had written to this Trappist group and explained my intention. Well, I soon lost that notion, but I still wanted to see Gethsemane, because my other reason was Thomas Merton, the famous poet, was there as a — I think Merton must have been a priest, but he certainly was a monk as well and had a very broad academic liberal arts background, which was quite surprising because he had seemed to turn his back on all that to become a devout Catholic monk. Well we did get to — we hitchhiked to Gethsemane. It was sort of awkward for the three of us in the mountains, but I thought it was a very pleasant experience because some of the people that picked us up were farmers and we were in trucks, and they didn't seem to — I don't know what it is — but they certainly didn't seem provincial. They were willing to accept us for what we were. Of course we didn't try to scandalize them in any way. We at least tried to keep within the acceptable stream of intercourse, you know. We weren't going to tell them we were Marxists or Stalinists or people running around with bombs and such things. And so Knute and Faf and I really enjoyed our stay at Gethsemane. These two people were also very vital people. They had their own special talents, and to me it was part of my learning experience not only to talk to the guest monk who came to explain to us what was going on in the monastery, but to listen to Faf and Knute talk about it afterwards. So, I was constantly picking up these little clues and tidbits of information and ways of seeing the same thing with different ways. We were delighted with the lunch and the dinner they gave us. It was all free because in the tradition of medieval hospitality, we were pilgrims. At the conclusion of our visit, I think Faf asked if they expected a donation, and they said "Well we

understand that you're college students." But we gave them something. It was certainly token, but not very much. But then when we left the monastery, Faf and Knute played a trick on me which I didn't like, but I had to go along with it. They decided that in order to get back to the college it would have been easier if we had split up. Instead of three of us hitchhiking, that we all split up. Well, I went out first and immediately got a ride, and then they joined up together. They didn't split up. So, I guess that might have intensified my psychological phobia that nobody likes me, but anyway as soon as I got to the nearest town, I said, "Oh, the heck with this hitchhiking," and I caught a bus back to the college and Faf and Knute came back about, oh, a week later with whatever other experiences they had.

I must remember also that while we were hitchhiking to Gethsemane we stopped at Berea, Berea College. I liked Berea. It reminded me of a similar experience I had in the United States Army when I was hitchhiking in Belgium, and I went to a British camp and asked to be put up for the night, and explained that I was not AWOL, that I had a travel pass. And the British would put me up, but they had to know my rank — in this case it was corporal — because I was put in a room with corporals. (LAUGHS) That sort of thing was not what you would think of at Black Mountain, certainly. But at Berea we were in a room with other college students, and I liked the college students. They did seem to be a little bit more clean-cut and wholesome and less experimental than your typical Black Mountain student. But I would like to go back to Berea, perhaps on an Elderhostel, experience a

little bit more of that atmosphere and of the way in which they combine work and play and study, apparently more successfully than we did at Black Mountain.

MEH: The interest in Berea and the monastery, did that grow out of the Utopian class, the class on Utopias?

RA: In my case, I didn't make that connection.

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

RA: Now, Knute was also in Rondthaler's class. I, I think that Berea, if we had had a chance to examine it perhaps more thoroughly, would have made a good comparison both with Black Mountain and to the concept or the workability of a utopia. But even in the case of Berea, I think that being a college, it couldn't have been a permanent utopia, though the students would undoubtedly acquire attitudes that would help them later if they wanted to — certainly, in a small way — live a life which would be utopian. If you define that as living a life without undue distress. Of course, when I got back to Black Mountain I spent about — this was during one of our periods when we had something like a recess. It was a period when we were not going to class, and we were at liberty to do what we pleased. So, I got together my talk, which I gave later supposedly to Rondthaler's group, but because I had labored so long and hard on the talk I made it a community-wide event. I remember in our dorm downstairs was a large sitting room, and it was packed with people and even going up the stairs there were people on the balcony, and some of the famous Black Mountain children were there, too. So, I wish I had kept that, but along with so many of my papers they went inevitably into the wastebasket. But I gave my beautiful uplifting talk on life

at the monastery, and after it was all over, Faf came to me and said, "I see you included in the talk a lot of my comments." I said "Well, that's what I do anyway. I'm always looking for clues." (LAUGHS) So, I borrow them from whatever source I can, and I think that that's not necessarily plagiarism, but — especially if whatever you acquire from other people, sometimes you're supposed to say, "Well, as Faf said," but I didn't say that in my talk. Perhaps I should have. (LAUGHS)

MEH: Did you have any interest in music at the time?

RA: That's — there were certainly students at Black Mountain that were very musical. It wasn't yet a one-track narrow-minded organization. There was — with ninety students and all of them with different interests, it wasn't an art college, and it wasn't a poetry college, but we did have many students, especially among the women, that were very interested in music. I remember — One of the students was an African American girl who was there, and I remember that she — I told her that I was tone-deaf, and she took me into a room and tried to teach me the principles of pitch and didn't get anywhere. But it was very nice of her to spend time with me. I brought to Black Mountain with me phonograph records of Alexander Nevsky and Leopold Stokowski playing Boris Godunov, in the orchestral version, and I believe also an Alexander Kipnis version of Boris Godunov. And I remember playing them to the students, and they were all as fascinated with that music as I was. It was... as you can tell, it tended to be very loud and robust and music with a lot of strange tones and drama to it, so that I

think they all appreciated that. But that was my contribution to the musical scene.

MEH: What did you do as part of the work program?

RA: As I look back, I think that I got out of the work program! I had this strange feeling about work, because when I was back in Gloucester in the summertime I had to work to make enough money to go to college. Then when I went to college, the last thing I wanted to do was to work, start working all over again. I'm not sure how I finagled it, but I believe that I had a very brief acquaintance with the farm, and it certainly didn't bring out any great feelings of affection or love on my part, so that was the one and only time I was over there. Then they at one time asked me to make a mop rack, which of course I was completely incapable of doing, but they gave me a hammer and some nails and some pieces of wood and expected me to make this mop rack outside the dining room commons. I recall that when I was doing it I had an enormous audience of people on that outside porch watching me in amazement as I staggered around trying to make the damn thing stand up, which of course it never really did. Something like, what was that? Buckminster Fuller's experience (LAUGHS). That – I think after that they had given up on me completely, and so if I did any work it was very little, it certainly doesn't loom in my mind. Oh, I believe I washed dishes in the kitchen on a few occasions, and maybe I raked the lawn or picked up some leaves or something like that. But work certainly wasn't a major attraction and didn't take much of my

time at Black Mountain. On the other hand, I did meet at least one student to whom work was everything. He came from rather wealthy parents, unlike me, and perhaps that was the reason because he wanted to stay at Black Mountain for the rest of his life, just doing work.

MEH: Who was that?

RA: I forget his name. But it was early on, I thought him rather pathetic, that student. But I must get around to Arthur Penn. I did participate in the community life in the sense that I was always willing to volunteer to do theatrical work and to read poetry. I'm good at reading poetry, but not so good at writing it. So, in some of our meetings – I believe we tried to have some kind of an entertainment either every week or every other week in the dining room – and I was in a skit — First, I was in a skit reading T. S. Eliot's poetry, and I had somehow got the rhythm, which in some Eliot has a very pronounced, almost like Vachel Lindsay, rhythm. And I remember afterwards that Albers, who was supposed to be a man that thought only of art and had no time for anything else, called me over and told me he was delighted with what I had done. So, I thought, you know, "Albers is a really an all-around guy!" And then Arthur Penn got ahold of me for Aria Da Capo, and I think that that was probably at Black Mountain the climax of my experience. The effect it had both on me and on the audience was probably more keen than my talk on the monastery. I was Pierrot and Arthur Penn had seen The Children of Paradise, and the mime in there – was it Barrault? And he wanted me to perform with some of those

gestures. Well, I realized later that it takes a lot of time to perfect that, but I did perform with more of an expansive mode of gesture than I usually did, because I had taken my cue from Penn. I don't know if he actually demonstrated what he wanted me to do or whether I picked it up on my own, but it seemed to blend very well with my rather awkward character at the time. So, the students were really entranced with me as Pierrot, and I remember that Knute wrote in one of his reminiscences about my Pierrot performance, so it must have been really good if he could remember it after something like thirty years as an event.

MEH: Did you take Arthur Penn's class? Formal class?

RA: I didn't take Penn's class. Penn was a student. I understand — I don't know if he started that class at that time or later, but I had — Even if I was aware of the class, because when we were all in our own cocoons, it takes a special person to be open to all experience, and I was too interested in self-development. But I appreciated what Art Penn did. I think that, as I look back, there was a missed opportunity because if I, as we say, if we could do things all over again I would have tried to get a little bit closer to him and to tap some of what I sensed was his fertility than I did at the time.

MEH: How did he go about putting the play together — directing the play and directing you?

RA: Well, Penn directed it. Aria Da Capo is a fascinating anti-war play, but the Pierrot was a, oh, really delightful person. He was very shallow and

frivolous and superficial, but everything was in that theatrical, artificial vein so Edna St. Vincent Millay, who wrote that play, was combining this ornate, rococo atmosphere with something very disturbing and gritty and realistic, and that was war and the consequences of war. I think Aria Da Capo is based on a musical form that has those contrasting movements, so I think it was a very moving and thoughtful play, with these extremes of superficiality and substance. The other members of the cast also seemed to catch that feeling of integration. Maybe that was Penn that did it, because I've acted in many plays since and sometimes you have a feeling that you're simply there spouting your lines to other puppets that are there spouting their lines, but other than the fact that there may be an intellectual meaning in what you're saying, there's no real sense that you're part of the same scene. So, I think he had an enormous talent. I understand later he taught at Black Mountain, but I think he was essentially just like me, a GI and a student.

MEH: It may have been the next year that he was a student-teacher.

RA: Yes. So I — Later on at Bard College, where I went after Black Mountain — another progressive college, makes an interesting contrast — the highlight of that experience was being Sir Andrew Aguecheek in William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, which was another frivolous comical character, where you could go all out and be spontaneous and be a buffoon because that was part of what you were supposed to be. And that was the highlight of my Bard College experience. After that I got around to

the serious business of earning a living and never went into the theater again.

MEH: Why did you leave Black Mountain after a year?

RA: Well, it was my intention — I think that I previously said that I couldn't get into other colleges because I hadn't taken a college preparatory curriculum. However, I had found out that your Black Mountain credits, among certain schools, would allow you easy access into their colleges without all the strenuous credits that you were supposed to have in algebra and geometry and calculus and Latin and chemistry and all those subjects that I hadn't taken. So, it was relatively easy for me to transfer from Black Mountain to Bard, and I also got Dave Corkran, who I think took a fancy to me as a student, to write some very complimentary opinions about my — what I could do both for Bard and had done for Black Mountain. So, I don't believe I asked M.C. M.C. was always — while she was good at bringing people out in discussions, she was also a little bit formidable, a little bit distant to me, the way other students have spoken a great deal about how warm and humane she was, and probably was. I liked Bill Levi a lot.

MEH: Did you take his class?

RA: I didn't take his class, but I — Bill would read the papers that I wrote for M.C., and he would comment on them, and I liked him for that. I also realized that he was very much of an intellectual. I didn't realize how really profound he was until, oh, about five years ago I went into a used

bookstore and bought a history of philosophy that he had written. And then I realized that this man was no fly-by-night. He took his philosophy very seriously. He wasn't really an exponent of one particular philosopher. His attempt was to survey and know the whole field, know the whole variety of human knowledge. He wasn't, as I think Olson later tended to be, a spokesperson for one particular point of view as the only vital and real and true gospel. So — And I liked the whole scene. I understand that Bill had both people who liked him and people who disliked him both among the faculty and among the students. But I thought that the students that did like him were intensely intellectual, and from the reunions that I've been to, some of our most articulate and knowledgeable speakers had been Bill Levi's students.

MEH: How would you compare Bard and Black Mountain?

RA: Well, the first way in which I would compare them is that at Black Mountain you never knew who had money or who didn't. And we were all rather — no one really put on airs. Even as far as your clothes were concerned, they were all ramshackle and rundown. So we were all — whether we were all, say, in the same income bracket or not, it certainly looked as though we were. I suspect that some of the students came from pretty upper-class surroundings, but at Black Mountain, among the students, there was an attempt to be cordial. I never felt either snobbishness or sense of superiority because of, say, your family and the money they had, or even their reputation in other fields. There was that sense of equality. At

Bard it was very different. Bard was a rich man's college, and I think today, as it probably was then, was one of the most expensive liberal arts colleges in the United States. I had gotten in with my GI Bill and with a grant-in-aid from Bard, and with a little bit that I had to make up on my own with my summer work and with some money that my father gave me, so somehow I managed to get by although I was always regarded as a — not necessarily a second-class student but as one of these people from the other side of the tracks.

MEH: But in other levels, in terms of the curriculum, how would you compare Bard and Black Mountain at that time?

RA: Well, certainly at Bard the curriculum was much wider. It had — After all it was an offshoot of Columbia University, so many of the disciplines were represented. I tended to concentrate on literature. Again, the classes were rather small and discussion was perhaps the general practice, though some of the teachers who'd come from Harvard and Yale or Ivy League colleges preferred to convert it into a more formal lecture system. I had a great deal of freedom at Bard. I determined my own courses. We had a period every week, I believe, in which we had a faculty advisor, and we had an hour or an hour-and-a-half with him, and we invented our own curriculum or course of study. I studied Dante with Ted Weiss, and Tale of Genji with James Merrill, both of whom were accomplished American poets. Both my contact with them and my self-generated feeling towards these subjects — after all, I was the one that was taking these subjects

and learning them — even were important to me. The professor, or the teacher who was there with me, was simply there seeing how well I was doing. He wasn't teaching me the subject. I was learning it on my own, and when I went to him, I was explaining to him how much I had absorbed. So, in that sense the student-faculty tutorials were self-generating and self-determining, so I liked that a lot. I liked the students, but they were again very rich, and they all had cars and they all could do things that I didn't do, although I did have a bicycle and went around that way. There was a lot of emphasis on who you were and who your family was and what connections they could make. I think at Bard a lot of — many of the students who went on and became successful later -- had established connections at Bard that made that easier for them. So — I don't want to name names because I might show too much of my personal insecurities, but I do have many pleasant recollections of people I met at Bard and of some at Black Mountain. Most of my friends at Bard were Jews. At Black Mountain I had no idea what they were.

MEH: Did you stay there and get your bachelor's degree?

RA: At Bard I got the bachelor's degree. I also was accepted for entrance into Harvard Graduate School of Education, but at that time I was at loose ends. I didn't know where the money was going to come from and also I was trying to adjust myself psychologically, and to come to terms with my sexual orientation. I had been through some emotional turmoil due to a thwarted love affair, and so I gave up my education -- higher education --

and came to San Diego where I found employment rather quickly and have been here ever since.

MEH: What did you do professionally?

RA: Well, professionally at San Diego I worked with a utility company, San Diego Gas and Electric, and I chose the utility rather deliberately because San Diego was known at the time for its defense industries. And that's where most people worked, and it was very easy to get hired here. When there were contracts, they were begging people to come, and they were even training you when you came. But I wanted to get out of the defense because I realized it was a boom and bust affair: they hired you in droves and they fired you in droves, too. So, after a year with Convair, I applied for employment with San Diego Gas and Electric, because it represented a permanent employment. I understand today there's no such thing as permanent employment any more with this downsizing — that applies to all industries. But at that time, a utility was considered almost like a grandfather industry, very paternalistic, and employees were very rarely terminated.

MEH: What did you do for them?

RA: I worked in supplies at first, because I had told them I was a supply clerk in the United States Army. I didn't mention my college at the time, because I didn't think it would help me. Because one of the things you get accustomed to hearing is that you're overqualified, and having had that said to me a couple times before, I just didn't mention my college

background. After I got in, though, I got into the clerical aspects of supply, into ordering and keeping the inventories of material. That's basically where I stayed for my entire forty years with the San Diego Gas and Electric. I always regarded it as simply a means of survival. I kept up my interest in literature and in history, which I think at the time became dominant over literature because I found out that people would publish me if I wrote about historical subjects pertaining to San Diego but they weren't interested in my views on Hamlet or Moby Dick or War and Peace.

(LAUGHS)

MEH: Obviously, looking around, you have many interests besides your paying job.

RA: Well, basically it evolved a new interest in the San Diego Historical Society and into parks, because I got involved in some of the controversies over what was going on in Balboa Park in San Diego, which is kind of a mix of landscape and museums, and the museums tended to preponderate. Some of those activities I think work against park theory and park philosophy. I believe that – well, like perhaps all politics is local so perhaps all learning should start out on a local level – but I think that you have to try to find out what's going on in the rest of the world as well. So, I joined the National Association for Olmsted Parks, and I'm a member of Friends of Central Park, which I very rarely get to, and I've written for newspapers and for the National Recreation Association. So, I've tried to evolve into a person who knows more about what's going on in the outside world as

well as what's going on in San Diego, and I try to bring the two together so that people here may get rid of some that provincialism, which I think is part of the San Diego ethos. You sometimes hear that we're the finest city in the United States or the finest city in the world, or we have the finest park in the world or the greatest architecture, and all that is simply ridiculous. I find it salutary, for me at least, to keep reminding people about it. Sometimes I don't think it means anything to them what my opinions are (LAUGHS). But I haven't really kept up any contact with people from Bard or Black Mountain, and I really didn't know much about them. Oh, of course, I knew about Charles Olson and the demise of Black Mountain, but that was only through kind of remote hearsay. I knew also about Olson because of his connection with my hometown, but I had never really given him any serious thought as a poet. Today I'm still struggling with Olson as a poet. I tend to perhaps — I don't think he was an oracle. I think we overestimate people when we make them oracles. We overestimate M.C., who is now regarded as some kind of an all-knowing, all-wise person, and I think that's probably true of Olson as well. I think as with most people in Gloucester, we were delighted with Olson as a character, and I think most people who met him were. I'm not aware though of his profundity. Perhaps people who knew him better are, or perhaps people are whom he may have disrupted in his sweeping approach and bulldozer attack and who wrestle with his influence. I think he was -- I think I mentioned this before about Bill Levi. Bill knew Alfred North Whitehead, but he knew a lot more

besides. Olson said he knew Whitehead, but I think he only knew a little bit of Whitehead. (LAUGHS) But that's not to say that he didn't write some fine poetry. "In Cold Hell, In Thicket" is a masterpiece of feeling. I think, however, that anyone who's that influenced by Ezra Pound wrote a lot of poetry that was gibberish as well.

MEH: What do you think, thinking back, is the importance of Black Mountain College as a school? Or its value?

RA: I had a talk with Knute about that, and Knute is of the firm conviction that Black Mountain was very profitable to him as an artist, and what it did to him and to others in opening up the world of art. For myself it was simply part of one long spectrum of influence. It didn't make me or break me, although I did, as I said before, I think Dave Corkran gave me an enormous push forward in helping me to defend my ideas and develop them as I have since. Maybe I'm writing entirely about San Diego affairs, but I'm still writing in that fervent way that I — I don't believe anyone should just shoot off their mouth. They should know a lot about what they're saying. And I think I got that from Black Mountain. As a person, I'm not sure that we're very richer as people because, say, of the impact of half a semester or two semesters in our life. We take more directions as people, and we have ups and downs, and we cope with things as they come along. Black Mountain doesn't supply you with some kind of inner moral compass that gets you through everything for the rest of your life, like supposedly going to church or reading philosophy does. But it's part of

my experience, it's part of my background, and I enjoy going to the reunions primarily to see all those other people. Some of them are what I would consider really top-notch professionals in their fields, and others are less so. But there is that variety. Sometimes I'm curious about those people that aren't at the reunions, whether that's because they are no longer alive, have repudiated their past, have other interests, or don't like the disconcerting contrast between their own achievements and other people's successes.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]