Interviewee: Mary Caroline “M.C.” Richards
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
Location: Oakland, California
Date: February 25, 1998
Media: 1 Videotape / 2 Audiotapes
Interview no. : 212
Transcription: Mary Emma Harris, January 2016.

[BEGINNING OF INTERVIEW. BEGINNING OF TRANSCRIPT}
[INTRODUCTORY TECHNICAL COMMENTS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

NOTE: There was not a student named John Kelly registered at Black Mountain. Perhaps the John Kelly whom M.C. mentions was a visitor or perhaps she was mistaken in the name.

MEH: M.C., how did you come to be at Black Mountain College?

MCR: I was hoping your questions were not going to ask me to try to retrieve everything out of the past. But I see that you’re starting at the real past, and I’ll do my best to try to recall how that happened. When I was a student at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, a young man named John Kelly, who had been a music student at Black Mountain, told me about it. He had a brochure which he gave me which interested me very much. It was pictures of Lee Hall and the new place under construction. It was mostly photographs of students and teachers sitting around what looked like a construction site, working together on something. It looked very real, very immediate. As if they were doing something real. I was enormously interested. He gave me that. That was about 1937.[1] In

[1] There is no record of a student named John Kelly enrolled at Black Mountain. Richards perhaps has confused the name. The construction on the new buildings at Lake Eden did not begin until 1940 although there were many photographs of the work program in brochures.

1945, I was leaving marriage and a job in the Southwest. I had gotten my PhD in English at the University in California and done some teaching. The only thing that I could think of to do was to look into Black Mountain to see if it still existed. But on my way I stopped in Chicago to see a friend who had been a graduate student at Cal, and I was offered a job at the University of Chicago. So I stopped. I taught there for three quarters only to be confirmed in my feeling that higher education, as it's called, was not to be trusted, and that I didn't want anything more to do with it. So I got in touch with Black Mountain. I wrote to Black Mountain and said I was interested. And I got a letter back asking me if I wanted to apply. They thought I was applying to be a student. No, I wasn't applying to be a student. I was applying to be on the faculty. That gave me my first sort of home movie in motion of Black Mountain and its sufficiency. I thought it was charming that they couldn't get it straight as to what it was I wanted to come for. But I did get invited down for an interview, and that's how it happened. I came for an interview, and Bill Levi, whom I was seeing in Chicago, and his daughter and that little dog, we all got married and came down. We were offered jobs at Black Mountain. That was in 1945.

MEH: You came down to give a lecture on Thomas Hardy?

MCR: Thomas Hardy and Joseph Conrad on irony.

MEH: Your background at that point was really conventional, academic.

MCR: Yes, yes.

MEH: You really saw yourself then as having more of an intellectual career than developed later in your life, a career in teaching.

MCR: Oh, I didn't know. I was ready to give it all up. Then I came to Black Mountain to see if there was any hope at the other end of the stick. There was, and I became very interested in Black Mountain and very enlivened by it and by the program, the consultation and the arts and the art experience. Not art education, not art history, not art appreciation, but doing. And of the working community and the work on the farm, the work program and the intellectual disciplines based on imagination. Oh, the voluntary simplicity and living. It all appealed to me enormously. [TELEPHONE RINGS. INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

MCR: Fifty years. More than fifty and I'm supposed to remember everything? Oh, I remember Wes Huss. He was wonderful, a formative experience in my life.

MEH: Not really.

MCR: Yes, my expectations were not that clear, so that every new thing was like an articulation of a possibility. I mean, that's all I had, possibilities. I didn't have any real evidence, so right away the informality and the relationships between people and the seriousness of the faculty. The conscientious faculty meetings and the community meetings and the work in the arts. The friendliness, encouragement. It was a wonderful atmosphere of being both very, in a way, informal and spontaneous and very serious. Very committed. Very intentional toward the things that you thought were really important. Yes, and then allowed my own sleeping possibilities gradually to emerge. I discovered the printing shop and got all that Pied Type together and got the print shop going. Printed my own personal book of verse. It was tremendous. And the work in writing. I, of course, taught freshman composition at the University, but teaching "freshman

composition" at Black Mountain was a little different. We didn't call it that. Also I did it as a writing course in which I participated. Put all my own stuff in the folder along with everybody else's. That was fun and that was a step to become a participant in the writing culture, as it were.

MEH: Do you think the college worked as a community?

MCR: Oh, yes. It was wonderful.

MEH: Obviously, there were a lot of conflicts, disagreements, disruptions.

MCR: Well, that's a community. That's what a community is. Community is a lot of people trying to work through questions and problems and raising questions and looking for answers. That's what a community is. A community isn't a popsicle. I mean, you just sit there and suck on something together. A community is a group of people doing the work of community which is to get on together and to do the things that need to be done. I thought it was marvelous, and I may not have had as much patience as I should have. There were people who complained, felt that it should be easier than it was or smoother than it was or there shouldn't be these problems. I think that's par for the course. If you take a group of people like us who have had no training in community at all and have come out of a competitive, arrogant, higher education set-up, and then we're put in this idyllic situation, we're called upon to have resources we simply don't have of imagination and goodwill, humor and all of that. Patience. But we gradually develop them. I thought it was marvelous. Yes. I wish it could have had more support from those great supporters who now give money to people to write

their PhD theses on Black Mountain but wouldn't give us a penny when we needed it to continue our work.

MEH: Do you think that the college would have benefited if people had had some more training or background in working as a community?

MCR: Yes. It's a new art. The social arts are the new arts. The whole planet is involved now in trying to develop some sense of how to get on together. How to do the common work. We were a pioneering sort of task force there, trying to do it, trying to learn how to do it and also to come up to the realization that it was a real work. It wasn't just something you fell into. Oh, yes, we get together and that's all there is to it. It's like having a party. We get together and have this party. But realizing that it's a real labor that involves both inner work and external work. I don't know if we'd had more, you mean like, those workshops now in training for leadership and all that stuff. I don't know. I think it was just perfect the way it was. I mean, it had its life, it did its work, and then it went as far as it could, and then it sowed its seeds and went on. At the time that it adjourned, I was brokenhearted. I couldn't believe that we had fumbled the ball like that because I thought if we can't do it here, where can you do it in the world? We don't have anything against us except our poverty. But I don't feel that way now. Now I feel we did remarkably well. We did the best we could, and we sowed a lot of seeds in the society and in our own lives. My own life has been deeply affected and formed by the Black Mountain experience. My adult work and the writing that I have done where I've come into the theme of wholeness which is what I began to be awakened at Black Mountain. I don't

know if it would have helped, Mary. I mean, I don't care. For me it's a fine story as it is.

MEH: How do you think community affected the education of the students relative to the typical experience where you go and you take classes and you go home or you go to the dorm? Having the work program, the dining hall, the lack of structure.

MCR: How did it affect students?

MEH: Or even teachers. If you had been at the University of Chicago, and they'd had a program in pottery, do you think you would have become involved the way you did at Black Mountain?

MCR: I don't know. Because, of course, the thing at Black Mountain was all so integral to the place. It was so easy. You didn't have to take a subway anywhere. It was all just right there. It was part of a unity. I think that certainly was important that there was this feeling that what you were doing – if you were doing the dishes or something else – that it was not separate from the intention of the community or the college as a whole. It was part of it, and that part of our work part at the college and our education was to participate in the daily work that needs to be done and in good humor and fidelity. Doing it was hard lessons for people. Often they didn't want to and they weren't used to having to do it, and they had to get new habits. It was really very instructional. I thought that was just fine. I'm temperamentally, you know, sympathetic to people sharing the work. I have a piece of writing in my new book Opening Our Moral Eye called "Creativity and the Practice of Awe," and in it I tell the story of having been discussing ways of

working with students at the college where I was teaching, and they wanted to hear about my – what was my work and what did I do. So I started telling them about the garden where I live and the string beans and the spinach and how I freeze the spinach and beans and how I weed the strawberries and all. [One asked,] "Isn't that rather menial." I was shocked. I thought "menial." I couldn't remember for a moment what it meant. I remembered it meant low on the employment scale and unworthy work and sort of embarrassing work. Menial. And I was amazed to hear that, to realize that there are people who think that growing food is not as important work as – I don't know what – being on the stock market or being a professor. So at Black Mountain my instincts and intuitions about the importance of work and these basic realms was supported and confirmed and nourished. I'm very happy about that.

MEH: At Black Mountain if you wanted to use the print shop, you didn't have to take a course in printing?

MCR: There was no course in printing. No. If you wanted to know how to do it, you had to find out some other way. Yes.

MEH: It seems that, having talked to a lot of students, that the availability of these resources without having to enter a structure in order to participate was a key element in their exploring their own abilities.

MCR: Yes. I think so. Wonderful. You just go down there, and there's the pottery studio or there's a sculpture studio. There's the print shop. There's the wood shop. There's the dining hall where the dance or the dancing or the plays or the baseball or whatever [take place]. Wonderful kind of feasibility. What I call the

individuality of the whole place. It was manageable for what you wanted to do. If people would be able to think a little more clearly about what it is they really want and then provide the situation where they're likely to get that and not something else –

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

[VIDEOTAPE ONLY] But it seems to me that now as I talk with people that they very rarely think about what they really want or that's the level of dream or something so they're really more geared to what the necessities, [AUDIO TAPE RESUMES] the possibilities or what they have to do to make a living, and it's is quite a different set of questions, you know, what do I do to make a living or what do I really need in my life. [Do I] need access to certain kinds of resources? Do I need access to certain kinds of community? Do I need privacy and association and how do I get those things? What kinds of social forms can we make where those are available?

MEH: You said that you remembered primarily people from Black Mountain. Who are the people that you remember most vividly and who made the most difference in your life as it informed?

MCR: They all made a difference in my life. I don't know what I said to people, but Max Dehn, the mathematician, and Fritz Hansgirg, the physicist, and Elliot Merrick, the lit teacher, and the Albers and all of the artists that came. Our farmers. Ben, the handyman, and Malrey Few and Cornelia and George Williams, our cooks. And the students. All the wonderful, wonderful students. Herb Cable, who was a special student of mine who died very young, and my associates and colleagues

Betty and Pete Jennerjahn. And Bimbus, the music [TELEPHONE RINGS. INTERRUPTION IN TAPING] Amy Evans McClure, a wonderful young lady, married to the poet, Michael McClure. Do you know him? She was a great clay artist herself. Wonderful sculpture. Wonderful.[2] So, who are all my beloveds?

MEH: How do you remember Max Dehn? What about him made him memorable?

MCR: Well, everything about him. The way he looked, the way he talked, his seriousness, his effervescence, his love of hiking. He's the one who took me up to the top of the hill the day I was to give a lecture when I first arrived. He took me out to the top of the pasture without any regard to time and got me back down in time for my presentation. His interest in the flora and the fauna. He was just a wonderful person. There's a very vivid image in my inner eye of Max Dehn and Toni, his wife. Jalowetz and Charles Olson and the Wolpes. Wes Huss. Yes, Wes Huss. Arthur Penn and the wonderful students that I'm still in touch with. Jesse Dawes Green. And Eva somebody – Jungermann, who's bringing out a poetry thing that I'm helping her with. She was a student of mine, and now she's involved in something called Focus on Art, and she's bringing out the poetry volume. Then, of course, the three weeks of the summer that changed my life when those potters came. Warren MacKenzie and Daniel Rhodes and Peter Voulkos. Black Mountain was just amazing. How we did that I don't know. I wasn't present when Hamada and Bernard Leach and Yanagi came. But I felt very much the impact. It was just wonderful. It was such a real place where real people came.

[2] There is no record of either Michael McClure or Amy Evans McClure being at Black Mountain College as students. They possibly visited It is probable that M.C. knew Amy Evans McClure in San Francisco.

MEH: What do you think that Black Mountain has to say to education today?

MCR: The universities should all close and only reopen when they really want to, when they have really something they want to do and to teach on the lines of a more human scale and a more personalized relationship to the curriculum and to each other, a more participatory form in the community and the government, and a recognition of the essentially artistic and spiritual character of all experience so that those barriers that are beginning to soften –that the barriers between the sciences and the disciplines and the arts begin to dissolve. And that people more and more feel a freedom in themselves really to ask for what they need and do what they think is important. I remember when I left Black Mountain and then I started to teach part-time at City College, and it was wonderful because I came to that job at City College having been at Black Mountain and instead of feeling, “Oh dear, here I am in a foreign country”, I felt, much more like, “Oh, well let’s see what use I can make of that. How I could do that here?” I discovered there was a lot I could do. For example, I could teach what I wanted. I didn’t have to ask. You can think you have to ask, but you don’t really have to ask. You signed up to give a course in Victorian Poetry. Great. Victorian Poetry. What I wanted to do was to give a course in Gerard Manley Hopkins so that’s what I did. I said ”This is a course in Gerard Manley Hopkins. The rest of Victorian poetry you read and [were] responsible for.” So I learned that. And to personalize to my classes, I brought little cups that I made at home in the pottery. I brought them home-baked bread. They brought stuff from their lives so that in our class our classroom would begin to have a sort of little culture, a little

community culture with these extraordinary people who were working all day and then coming in the evening and that had many very severe experiences in the world, both at home and abroad. So, the Black Mountain experience which is just an experience partly of coming into your into your own powers, into your own wholeness, then you take that with you wherever you go you bring that in people's [experience]. How did you get to be the way you are? Well, who knows, but one of the ways I got to be the way I am is that I had those years at Black Mountain College, those formative experiences which were so right for me that I made use of them and far from rejecting them. They were like seeds sown. I'm very lucky. I'm very, very lucky to have met John Kelly at Reed College and have that brochure given me. Probably one out of twelve people in the country that even knew that Black Mountain existed. No, there was an article, wasn't there, by Louis Adamic in some periodical, "Education on a Mountaintop."

MEH: The college actually had a lot of publicity back in the '30s and '40sThere was information out there for people who were receptive. Students frequently say – even those students who were there for only a summer session – that this made other learning experiences more significant, in the same way that you taught differently having been at Black Mountain when you went into a conventional [school.]

MCR: Absolutely.

MEH: They say they learned differently.

MCR: Yes. I've become quite friendly with Suzi Gablik. She just came for a summer when she was sixteen, and it changed her whole life.

MEH: I hear this time and again, and people from outside don't believe it.

MCR: Yes, yes. It's just wonderful. I believe it. It changed my life. Usually that's when you're ready for it. You're ready for it. Of course, there had to be a lot of suffering because my marriage didn't survive since my husband didn't feel the same. He had quite a different relationship to the politics of the college and all that. So he wasn't as closely connected to the spirit of the college as I was.

MEH: If you were conducting this interview, what questions do you think should be asked?

MCR: For heaven's sakes.

MEH: I know that you're very ambivalent about people's recording Black Mountain College. I've been through a lot of questioning as to whether this is just a waste of my time. Somebody once said, "Mary, who cares?" But as someone else pointed out, if this is not recorded, your experience [will be lost]. I think that there are things that happened there that we can learn from in terms of how the learning situation can be transferred to other learning situations in institutions. I don't think Black Mountain should be just lost in our consciousness and memory.

MCR: No, but as you say it has received a lot of attention. People are writing their PhD theses on it, and it has received a lot of attention. As it should. Certainly, as it merits. There were so many important things about it. The most important thing is the feeling of the wholeness of the human being was created there. That it went all the way from Hansgirg, the physicist, and Albers, the painter, to our farmers. That you lived in the arts. You lived in the reality of the seasons and the growing of food. You lived in the reality of the building of the buildings, that you

are going to be active and in their maintenance and in their care. You lived in the reality of your own inner search for meaning and for information and your own need for relationship both with your contemporaries and with your elders. That was it. Yes. I think that that aspect is to me is the most important, and it's the aspect in education that is most frequently omitted. See, even though it may be a very good school for this or that, that the wholeness of the human being isn't considered. The importance of having easy access, say, to the resources of the labs and the studios and the other things you do. The scale now is so huge – oh, I should stop – and people are so lost. The scale of the university, the scale of the cosmos. It all seems so overwhelming that I think with Black Mountain, you see, that scale was reduced. In printing you take a large type, and you make it smaller so it doesn't cover the walls before you can read it – where you can use it. I think that was very, very important. Now I went to a college not overwhelmingly large, Reed College, but my quarrel with Reed was sort of self-congratulation generally on its intellectual record – intellectual status. Because when I was there, there was very little in the arts. Now there's much more. But even so, I'm sure they don't have a farm or anything like it. The brochures that I get from it, it's all so promotion, promotion, meaning more money and more praise, or more congratulation. We need to compete. I don't think Black Mountain was competing with anybody. I think it was having a hard time keeping up with its own vision, like with the interracial policy. That was a difficult area to move into in the South. But we did what we could. To work in education out of the same sources of individual conscience and imagination and

good humor that you live your life, I think that's desirable. I think that's what we were able to do it Black Mountain, what we were allowed and then reinforced. That we would come together as the people we were to do what we could do together, what we wanted to do and try to imagine what was best to do. And to take our losses. Right, I, mean, to realize that sometimes you make mistakes or you don't know. You can't do it. But to be able to make your mistakes and not become rancorous and defeated I think is a tremendous piece of education. Don't you? To be able to say we did the best we could, and it lasted thirty-three [twenty-four] years. God bless it. And then it had to recycle. It had to recycle. There are bits of it, hopefully, on the grain of the earth. Lowinsky, that was another faculty member whom I loved. [TECHNICAL COMMENTS ABOUT CLOCK TICKING NOT TRANSCRIBED]

MEH: I'd asked you before, what do you think are the questions that should be asked with respect to Black Mountain?

MCR: I didn't have a chance to think about that.

MEH: We aren't in any hurry. Just think now.

MCR: Well, I think the question about how did you find your way to Black Mountain is an interesting question because what would have brought a person? It was not accredited. It was very offbeat. What brought you to Black Mountain? And I think that would give some interesting, intuitive material perhaps. Some cultural clashes, the sort of cultural stereotypes that somebody was in the position to challenge. Yes, I don't know. That question, what was the most important aspect of Black Mountain and its influence upon you, not just observing it but in the

impact in your own life. Its [the only thing [?]] you can say about it. What was the most powerful for me was the imagery of wholeness as that began to be fleshed out quite unconsciously. It was only in thinking about it later that I realized how that had come about. Knowing all the pros and cons and so on, would you do it again?

MEH: Would you?

MCR: Oh, yes, in a minute. Oh, yes.

MEH: What changes would you make?

MCR: What changes?

MEH: How would you change it? How do you think it could a better learning community, a better community?

MCR: Well, I think if there were more financial stability, then the faculty would be more likely to be able to stay and not have to go off and find other employment. That would be that the continuity could be developed if there were more financial support. Is that a reasonable answer?

MEH: Yes.

MCR: Yes, I think what it would need, more financial support. But the other things seemed to be in the right direction. The work program, I think, was brilliant. The farm and the government by the faculty. Then there was a small group – I can't remember what it was called – the executive committee or something [Board of Fellows], and the community meetings. Then the wonderful meeting at the beginning of the year when we would decide what was going to be taught. Oh, that was just marvelous.

MEH: How did that work?

MCR: Well, you would say what you wanted. There'd be a conversation in which you would say as a teacher what you would like to teach, and the students would say what they would like to learn, and then the conversation would develop. For example, I wanted very much to give a course which I called the Philosophical Novel. I think it was the Brothers Karamazov and I don't know what. Maybe Joyce's Ulysses. I don't know. But would there be any takers? Then there got to be an interest in a Shakespeare course. I don't know whose idea that was, but I was willing to teach it, and there was a lot of people who wanted it. It seemed to me just to be able to have that kind of conversation out in front. Then also be vulnerable – to have to say, well, great, but I wouldn't be able to do that or I wouldn't feel comfortable doing that, and to know that there's no blame. Once it's a real conversation, it's not an examination. It's just conversation. I liked that. Also I liked that in teaching a course, knowing that the next year the people would come back, that you'd have the students. Right. You could look ahead. We would look ahead and think about what we wanted to do the next year and that was also marvelous As we were going through material, maybe as we were doing the short story and we read a Thomas Mann. The next year I gave a whole course in Thomas Mann because of the amount of interest. The freedom to do that, to let the curriculum, as it were, grow organically out of people's interests was exciting to me. Because usually you just get handed a book with titles. "Now you're going to teach English 101." I mean, this was really dynamic. I like that. And maybe that is the thing. It was a very dynamic reality that you

walked into when you walked into Black Mountain College. Maybe that was the thing –that was both a choice people made and a challenge to find out that it's dynamic and it isn't that marvelous. But I [didn't] know if I can live this way. But I could and I liked it very much. As I say, it's had a big influence on my whole philosophy of life,– my Centering book where the discipline of centering is bringing in and rather than leaving out and that was very much my feeling. Black Mountain was a discipline of bringing in rather than leaving out. Mostly education is just opposite. It's of editing out and just leaving in and what you think is important and competitive and moneymaking and so on. It's not really this gathering into one of all the elements of the living situation. Yes.

MEH: If you were to create a community that embodied a lot of the facets of Black Mountain, would you make changes to try to make some of the disagreements within the community less painful and more creative, so there could be less rancor and more compromise and understanding" Or do you think that's just how it is?

MCR: Well, I think there's hope. I think there's hope for the emotional and spiritual development of people, even with faculties that they can understand what their limitations are and their ability to understand and forgive and to respect differences. I mean, those are all important elements that we struggle for and I think inner development is essential for us as human beings whether we're professors or students I would think. Also the whole subject of conflict resolution has come to be much more of an area of exploration than it was then. Maybe a more open attitude, that conflict is the name of the game and how do we resolve

it? Instead of complaining and being afraid and being hostile. Somebody said, “Yes, that’s the way things go. Now how can we handle it.” I think there’s more of an address to that challenge, and I think with luck we might be open to having a workshop or two on conflict resolution. But you see, people are difficult. Human beings are difficult. They’re proud and rebellious and vain and competitive and all that has to be reduced. I feel optimistic about that as a possibility, that we will become more and more able to [handle] conflict imaginatively and compassionately and to be able to listen to each other’s points of view without poking each other in the nose and being outraged or insulted or whatever. That these are capacities that will grow and the whole political – I don’t really understand what it means – but something about the power, where the power lies. I know that Bill Levi was very outraged when he discovered that there were certain privileges accorded to certain members of the faculty and not to others. Outraged. Well, I wasn’t outraged, partly because I thought they deserved it, so I didn’t mind and partly because, why not? Maybe someday we’ll all get our car insurance paid for. Meanwhile, it’s nice that people who’ve been working so hard

[END OF AUDIO CASSETTE 1, SIDE 2.
BEGINNING OF AUDIO CASSETTE 2]

[VIDEO TAPE ONLY] for fifteen years with $25 a month should have a little recognition? That’s being where the power is, I guess.. See, there are some people [UNINTELL WORD] Black Mountain who are very interested in the political aspects and very energized by that kind of controversy, and if they smell an injustice, oooooh!, [AUDIO TAPE RESUMES] they get lots of mileage out of

it. I don't happen to be that way, and I think its destructive aspects will gladly become more and more apparent somehow.

MEH: I want to ask you to sort of describe some people as you remember them and then I want to talk about what you're doing here. First, how do you remember Charles Olson?

MCR: How do I remember Charles Olson? I remember him as being very large in every way. He was physically very large and imaginatively very large. He was a wonderful poet. A wonderful teacher. A great friend. And I remember him as being exceptional in his interest in culture, and his ability to direct the attention of the students toward sources of information about cultural trends. Yes, remarkable. A sage and a genius.

MEH: How do you remember Buckminster Fuller?

MCR: Well, I knew Bucky Fuller more outside the college than in. He was always a very bouncy, friendly, accessible, person to meet. Friendship was one thing but hearing him speak was something else. That used to amuse me, his capacity to speak at such length without any regard for anybody's ability to pay attention. He would be up there, he would close his eyes, turn off his hearing aid, and begin to speak, and that might go on for two or three hours. I thought that was amusing and also insight into the man's concentration and his development of a theme and his frontier mentality. I mean, he just was ahead of most of us, and almost everything I know about him was sensible. I still think if his advice could have been taken about putting all the wire communications underground instead of in the air, we wouldn't have the disasters of the ice storms that we have in the

East and so on. But they pay no attention to what he has said. And that we clean by air force rather than by water would also make things much less messy and difficult. Yes, Bucky Fuller I remember as a great sage, delightful, very warm and affectionate, devoted to his wife Ann and very warm in friendship.

MEH: How do you remember John Cage?

MCR: John Cage. That's a big one. I knew John – 1947 to, what was it? Forty-five, fifty years.

MEH: You met him first at Black Mountain, right?

MCR: He was one of my dearest friends. He and Merce, my dearest friends. Also shapers, monitors. Not a monitor. What is it? A mentor and a remarkable, remarkable person of exceptional gifts and humanity and courage. Perseverance. When there wasn't anything else to eat, he would go out to the fields and pick up mushrooms and hope that you avoid the poisonous ones. Remarkable. And such a remarkable development in his career, knowing him in the early days when we were all so poor. Including Robert Rauschenberg. I used to give him quarter to go on the subway. Then they all become masters, and John became so famous and overworked really and was able to do a lot that he wanted to do – push his music over very, very far. He wanted to do. A very dear and loving person. I have a poem am that I wrote for his 75th birthday in my book which is a – it's a very nice poem. The end of it – well, you know John's main contribution to culture was that he didn't make any distinction between noise and music. It was all music. And this poem ends – I don't know if I can quote it, but I'll try. It says, "The cows, John, the cows are banging their

udders like soft cymbals, / and the milkers are pulling the teats like bell ropes / up and down. The music, my God, the music!"[3]

MEH: How do you remember Merce?

MCR: Remember him? I just saw him recently. I remember him.

MEH: But how do you picture him?

MCR: Picture him? I picture him the way he is. I mean, he's just totally devoted to his mistress, the muse of dance. Works, if not every day now, almost every day. It always was that he worked every day, but now that he doesn't dance so much, he doesn't do that. Although he still appears on stage, and I've always said as long as his pinky moved, he'd be on stage, honoring the movement and working, with movement, the movement of the body. That's his joy, the movement of the body and the bodies, singly or in groups. I personally am not sympathetic to the music that's used, the electronic music. I don't like it, and I don't listen to it if I can help it. But that's a different question. His own work in choreography is quite separate from that. But that isn't what you asked me. You didn't ask me about his choreography. You asked me about Merce, what my picture of him is of this devoted artist, totally committed to the life of the imagination in relation to movement and a very warm devoted friend. Also shyness . He is so bright and so onward and so pressing along, however old he is. And he's beginning to shrink. I noticed the last time I saw him on the stage. we're all supposed to shrink, and I think he really has begun to shrink. I don't

[3] The section of the poem as it appears in Imagine Inventing Yellow (Station Hill, 1991) reads as follows:

….
The cows, John, the cows are banging their udders like soft cymbals,
and the milkers are playing the teats like bell ropes
tugging and letting go. The music, my God, the music!"

think I have yet. It's interesting. I love Merce Cunningham. He's one of my dearest friends. Yes.

MEH: A couple of other people. How do you remember David Tudor? How do you picture him?

MCR: Oh.

MEH: That's the big question. I know that's the big question.

MCR: I remember David – how can I answer that? I don't know how to answer that. Last time I saw him he had white hair, white eyebrows. Couldn't see, couldn't move much, smiled. I asked him if he didn't want a piano in his room where he could amuse himself playing. Oh, it was unthinkable. He just thought that was the funniest suggestion that had ever been made. Anyway, he probably couldn't find his way to it, but he wasn't really interested. So, I think he lost interest in music when he became an electronic composer. When I gave a little talk at his memorial, I said really I knew David best before the electronic phase and before – what's it called when they increase the sound so much? Not acceleration when they make a big sound. What do you call it?

MEH: I don't know. Amplification.

MCR: Yes, before amplification and electronics, both of which it seemed at the memorial service to have over taken his reputation entirely. The place was full of sound – electronic sound at an unbearable volume. However, in the time that I knew him best when we were living together that decade, remarkable person in his general sensitivity to the materials of life, gardening and all that. I mean, he was sensitive to the garden. He would order the seeds. I would do the planting. I

would do all the work, but he had a real feeling for lore and for the occult, the esoteric. It was through him that I became interested in Rudolf Steiner's work in Theosophy. It was through David that that happened.

MEH: It's remarkable that all of these people came together as friends in the late '40s and '50s. Some people knew one another outside of Black Mountain. Some met at Black Mountain. People like Rauschenberg. Ray Johnson. Vera and Paul Williams. You had this community of people, and the one thing they had in common was Black Mountain. What do you think was the common binding element in this group, the magnet that attracted them to one another and held you together as a community of friends and peers?

MCR: I have no idea.

MEH: This was a remarkable group of people to have found one another and to have connected.

MCR: We all came to that spirit center called Black Mountain College. Our destinies were in sync, that effect that we were all called to Black Mountain. But we met and recognized each other and pressed on together. We did, we came, we recognized each other. We became friends, and we were all there doing similar work. What was it? Who knows what it was? They were all [UNINTEL WORD] And then became friends and then dispersed and maintained our relationships and our support of each other's work. Yes, it was remarkable I think that we were brought, we were called – I like that word called – to a vocation. We were called by the spiritual voice of Black Mountain College, and we responded.

MEH: I like the word recognition.

MCR: Recognized. Yes.

MEH: If we are open, we recognize kindred spirits. One more question and then I'm going to let you go for today. Since you left Black Mountain, you've lived in the Gate Hill Community. You've lived in the Camphill Community.

MCR: I live there now.

MEH: Right. You live there now. Tell me, you always have looked for some community in your living situation when you could. How you see these communities as being important in your life? Obviously, they are important since you chose to live in this sort of situation. Explain what you're doing here

MCR: Well, my interest in community really began at Black Mountain. That's where it was born or it was burst and nourished. Then the continuity that followed that came out of it, and one thing leading to another. So that when we left Black Mountain, a few of us then wanted to begin again another place where some of that could happen [while] avoiding some of the pitfalls. So we didn't want to make a college. We wanted to make more like a housing community with shared studios and so on. Paul Williams had the money for it and was willing to do the architectural work. I was there for ten years, and then I moved into New York City for a while and then to England for a while. Then I came back, and I shared a place with Paulus Berensohn up north of Scranton where we shared house and studio space and made a garden and so on. It wasn't really a community but it was more than just me. We had neighbors who were close. Then the Camphill connection developed also naturally out of my interest in Rudolf Steiner's work and in community. I came to a time that in my own life where the

situation with Paulus Berensohn was discontinued. His life took him elsewhere and other things happened. Burt Supree, with whom I shared the place for a while, suddenly died, and I wasn't prepared to stay on up there by myself and hack out the winters and so on. I needed to move into another more supported situation. I knew about Camphill because I had visited many times the community which is near Kimberton, Pennsylvania, a community of about 120 souls about forty of them mentally handicapped and the rest the coworkers and their families. Four hundred sixty acres of land with big gardens and big field crops and milking cows and steers and chickens. And forests, streams. It's a working farm. And sheep. A working farm. And I had visited many times and was given the vegetables and homemade bread and all to bring home with me. So when I was thinking of where my life might go next, I thought of that and had a friend there whom I called to see if there was any – if she had a room in her house where I could come – I wasn't well –and heal and find my way. So I came. That was in 1983, and I was there for a while. Then came back in '84, and I've been there ever since. It's interesting the sort of continuity of going to the Camphill Community from Black Mountain because in many ways there are similarities. It isn't a school. It's a community, but there are people there who need special care in a way that students also need special attention and people need special care. There's a very strong emphasis on the arts. The commitment is to bio-dynamic agriculture. The place is self-owning, I guess you'd say, although it's part of a worldwide association of Camphill Communities for the handicapped in many countries. But in a given community, it's self-organized

and self-sustained. It charges its clients. They have to pay, but it is never enough so we always have to raise money in one way or another. So that's similar. A simple life. When I went to Black Mountain, it was $25 a month for board and room and health insurance. Well, at Camphill it's $75 a month petty cash and my expenses – for board-and-room and insurance and gas in my car and so on. So that atmosphere of making do is very congenial to me. I like it a lot. And it's a privilege to live where one of the intentions is to heal the soil and to create healthy food, good food. It's wonderful. I work in the arts there. I like that very much. I work in the house. I like that very much. So it has a kind of wholeness that I've been talking about, that I have been prepared for. My life has prepared me for that living all those various parts of myself with a sense of unity.

I come to California in the winter. I began doing it in order to avoid the bad weather in the East because I was getting sick. Now, like this winter, you can't say that anymore.[4] I was invited by Matthew Fox, who is a sort of renegade theologian. I was invited by Matthew Fox to come and teach in his program of Creation Spirituality – a master's program. When I first I began coming about ten years ago, [it] was housed on the campus of Holy Names College in Oakland. Meanwhile, Matthew has been dismissed from the Dominican Order which he was a member of for over thirty years and from the Catholic Church for disobedience and [he] has been taken up by the Episcopal clergy so he still is a priest but not a Catholic priest. But more importantly his work in the world is to

[4] It was an El Niño winter.

reinvent education and to reinvent religion. He's written lots of books. He sings and currently he has started a new university in downtown Oakland called the University of Creation Spirituality. He has, as he says, come down off the hill. He's now in the streets of Oakland at Broadway and 21st Street in a rented space but hopefully [it] will be bought before long. Creating a learning situation which will speak to the needs of the adult which are as much spiritual needs and needs for relating to each other and to the earth. A lot of eco-courses – eco-feminism and eco-psychology and whatnot. And to the mystical tradition. The mystics. Matthew owes a great deal of his determination and his inspiration to the mystics of the 12th and 13th Centuries. Meister Eckhart. Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, Thomas Aquinas. And the mystics are taught. And poets. Rumi, Capier [PH] The Native Americans and the black leaders. Howard Thurman and Sojourner Truth and rooms named after them. One of the essential elements of Matthew's program is what he calls Art as Meditation courses. He said the reason that he got in touch with me and invited me was that part of his program was inspired by his reading of my book Centering, long before we ever met, and so he feels that I am in cahoots somehow. He likes my course. I give a course in Creativity in Clay, Color and Words. So, that's when I come and teach that course, hang in. I'm living here in a place called the Quiet Place which was created sort of when the University was created a couple of years ago by somebody who isn't in here now as a community residential resource for students. You go to school in downtown Oakland, where you going to live? Right. Rents are high so that one of the challenges was to find a place

for people to live. I have been lucky. I live here, and I paint my room, and I take the bus to the University. So I have a kind of community life here. I go home the end of March. April I'll go back to Kimberton, to Camphill about in time for planting although it's been such a mild winter that apparently all the crocuses are up. I don't know. Maybe the trees, the fruit trees are in bloom now. I don't know. I hope they don't get a frost at the last minute. That would be devastating.

MEH: They probably will. It always happens.

MCR: Does that give you an idea of what I'm doing here?

MEH: Yes.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT. END OF INTERVIEW.]