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Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS  
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**[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]**

[NONINTERVIEW PRELIMINARY REMARKS NOT TRANSCRIBED]

**MEH:** [GIVES IDENTIFICATION] Wes, how did you come to be at Black Mountain College?

**WH:** Well, I was working for the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia. This was after the Second World War. I'd gotten there because I had been a Conscientious Objector to the War. And had come from – I'm giving a little background because I think it is important to understand why I got there. I'd come from this Civilian Public Service Camp where we had been located and I'd been the director. Although I was an assignee, I was also director of the camp. On the strength of that came back to Philadelphia. The camp was administered by the American Friends Service Committee.

**MEH:** Where was the camp?

**WH:** It was in Gor- – There were three of them. The most recent one where I was the director was in Coleville, California, which is one reason why I'm here – which is up on the Sierras. I was very eager to be in Philadelphia for two reasons. One is to pursue my theater interests which arose out of this camp

experience, having met with people from the Hedgerow Theater, which was near Philadelphia in Moylan, Pennsylvania, and also because I was interested in work that would follow my pacifist interests. The work was budgetary kind of work and administration, that sort of thing, supplies – administrative kind of work. I met there Don Warrington, who then went to Black Mountain, and kept in touch with him. I don't know how. I'm not sure at the moment why I kept in touch with Don. I think Don had been in one of the camps that I was at or something like that. I'd also heard – again I'm not sure just where I had heard about Black Mountain or what it was about and so on. But when Don went there, after he had been there a couple of years, I had the feeling that I'd like to visit then. So I wrote and asked Don. I'm not sure that that's accurate or what the sequence was, but anyway, I visited Black Mountain in – I think the very first visit was in June of – Let's see –

**MEH:** I think it was in '50. We could check my book.

**WH:** '50, yeah. So it was in June, the preceding June. The very first thing that happened when I went there – I think it was the very first time I was there or maybe the second – Anyway, I went five times before being comfortable about going, leaving the situation that I was in, being comfortable about going, and also being offered a job. I think I was offered the job early on, after the second or third visit, but anyway I did visit five times. But it was either the first or the second visit that I was asked by M.C. to participate in a reading – or to read the part of Jonah of Paul Goodman's Jonah. I did that with a little trepidation, since there were – I didn't want to step on the views – gestures – that would be

associated with someone with a Semitic background out of the sensitivity toward Max Dehn and others there, and managed I guess to work, though, with the material and came out of it with a sense that, with the feeling that people accepted that kind, my being there and working in that manner(?). I also was fascinated with the conflict that was going – that then was starting to generate, which was the conflict over whether – well, it was a major conflict over the direction of the college, the interpersonal. The thing that attracted me or the thing that I was most interested, which I always am, is the interpersonal relations: what was going on between people. I was in a very – Personally and psychologically, I was in a very open condition at the time and felt very happy about just being there in that setting and also responsive to and able to relate to various people without necessarily taking sides in issues. I felt very happy about being related to this organization, this outfit where there were some bitter things and felt that I could relate to practically anything that was going on. I was identified by the most conservative people as being from the Quaker group and yet my personal responses were clearly toward the non-Quaker, toward M.C. and Bill Levi and the Jennerjahns and so on. They were adventurous. So, I had the best of both. I felt the best of both worlds, I think. Also I had the skills – two skills, one which was in administrative work particularly and budget making. During that summer I was not – As I visited during the summer, but I didn't get into any of the conflict. I didn't know what was happening, really. I just knew – I also met Paul Goodman during that summer.

**MEH:** Were you there the entire summer? Of 1950. That was the summer Goodman was there. Were you there for the entire summer, or just a short visit?

**WH:** No, no, no. No, no. Just a couple of short visits. Very short – like weekends or two days or whatever. So, I didn't get in on any of the conflict. I was not associated with any of the conflict. I met Paul and I felt very close to Paul because I had had Reichian – I had some Reichian treatment and he was a Reichian. At any rate he had some sense of it. Also I was interested in Gestalt psychology, which he was. We talked. I remember a long conversation with Paul on vision, what might happen, at the college. I was very surprised, since I came from a situation where homosexuality was not a huge moral matter. I come from both in the Civilian Public Service Camp and also at Hedgerow Theater, my associations were multiple. I thought that this was strange for a college to be hung up on this sort of, on sexuality matters, but I wasn't involved in the whole thing. I guess Don, at that time, decided that he was leaving. I think he quit in that summer and so did some of the others, some of the other Quakers. That left the opportunity for a treasurer or that kind of experience open and also there was nobody in theater. So, at one point I was offered a job of coming to work with theater and as the treasurer. I accepted. Not at that visit but at the next visit I accepted. That was, that's how I (INAUDIBLE).

**MEH:** I'm just trying to remember. Did you tell me or was it someone else in the camp when you were in California during the war? Had you met Bill Reed who was at Black Mountain?

**WH:** Yes.

**MEH:** I thought so.

**WH:** Maybe that's the very first idea that I had about Black Mountain. That's right.  
That could well be. Yeah.

**MEH:** (OVERTALK) That's probably (OVERTALK)

**WH:** That could very well be, yes.

**MEH:** Did you find when you got to Black Mountain that it was a place where you didn't have to take sides?

**WH:** No. At a certain point I had to take sides but it still wasn't – I didn't feel sided. That is to say that I had a lot of relationships with a lot of people. The point where it culminated in sides, and the only one I remember that was important that it took sides, was when there was this controversy over whether Joe and Mary should be together or something of that kind, where it was very clear to me that this was a stupid sort of a question. I just insisted and in a sense, was the casting, deciding vote that Joe and Mary belong together. They should be.

**MEH:** Was the issue there the fact that they were living together and not married, or was the issue that Joe's divorce had not yet finalized from his first marriage? Do you remember?

**WH:** It was mixed. A total mix of issues. It depends on who you talk to. The most adamant was Nell Rice.

**MEH:** In opposition (OVERTALK)?

**WH:** In opposition. There wasn't any question in my mind that these people obviously were together. We're not going to break that up. But that's the only

time that I remember that there was a – that I had to take, you know, that there was a clear sides-taking in this, in that early time.

**MEH:** So, you really came to the college both as treasurer and as drama director.

**WH:** That's right.

**MEH:** Did you have regular classes that you taught in theater?

**WH:** Oh, yes. [AFFIRMATIVE].

**MEH:** What existed in the way of theater when you arrived?

**WH:** The Light-Sound-Movement Workshop. I guess that was about it. M.C. put on some readings.

**MEH:** How did you go about setting up your program? Did you have a particular style of directing?

**WH:** Well, my background was in the Hedgerow Theater, and the Hedgerow Theater was a repertory theater, and they dealt in primarily the classics with a couple of outbursts at times of more modern productions. The most recent production that I'd been in, for example, was – or one of the most recent ones – was The Caucasian Chalk Circle. So my perceptions of theater were relatively conservative and classic. I started out in that vein, which was relatively conservative, which is not totally within the vein of Black Mountain. At Black Mountain I learned. I came there and did what everybody else did, which was I learned from the environment, learned from the venue, started to understand and develop my craft – what I considered my craft at that time, which was theater. I'm not sure what the first production was, but I think the first production was André Obey's Noah. There may have been something before that but I'm

not sure. At any rate that was the first major production. But I was interested in forms, like construction. As I've told you in the last interview, I believe, I was eager to experiment in, you know, in not having the frame – not proscenium work but free of style and finding a way to use – and found that the Dining Hall was a marvelous, marvelous space that we could use in a free-flowing way. So built some, constructivist-like platforms and so on. We used those.

**MEH:** Was this for Noah?

**WH:** For Noah. This was primary. This started out being for Noah, but also because I knew that I could use that in various other ways.

**MEH:** Did you teach classes in drama, I mean separate from production? Or were your classes really geared toward production.

**WH:** Mine was theater, and it was not drama. I didn't teach drama. I was not a drama instructor. I was there – as my interpretation – as somebody who would be teaching theater and meaning that it was not – The emphasis was on doing something in theater in some way and not on studying dramatists or studying plays or any of that stuff. It was strictly on doing whatever it was. So, for the most part it was scenes or stuff that people created, things that I'd assign or people would come up with. It wasn't always toward production. I wasn't very oriented toward production, although there were a lot of productions. There were a number of productions. I was much more oriented towards just the experience of developing a character and developing scenes or developing whatever. In other words, I used whatever came – and in theater you have to use whatever comes to you. So, whoever came would have to find a way in

which that person would interact with or relate to the making a theater. That was the basic –

**MEH:** Was it you or M.C. who directed Marriage on the Eiffel Tower?

**WH:** She did.

**MEH:** Was that while you were there?

**WH:** Yes. [AFFIRMATIVE] Yes. She was on that – She was interested in – and I learned from M.C., some sense of her exploratory, in a larger sense of exploration than I had come in with. My explorations were within a relatively limited field of reference. So, I learned there were some other freedoms that you could – I also came in with a sense of professionalism, which didn't last very long because we were not building a professional theater. This was not totally within the Black Mountain spirit – that kind of professionalism that I came in with. That doesn't mean that there wasn't discipline and there wasn't all that sort of stuff, but the kind of professionalism I'm talking about is really a theatrical professionalism. My understanding of theater then developed as I went through the five years, five and a half years or whatever it was that I was there.

**MEH:** What do you think were the influences on your changing approach to theater? You said M.C. helped –

**WH:** Well, M.C. was good. M.C. helped. But mostly it was atmospheric. Things in the atmosphere, what people were doing in painting, what people were doing in music. I didn't feel any straight rapport with what Betty and Pete were doing in the Light-Sound-Movement Workshop. It was interesting, very interesting. I

went there and I absorbed and saw. But it seemed to be – at that time, it seemed to be a kind of a beside-the-point exercise, which I already felt that I knew in a sense. It was nothing revelatory. Is that a good word? Is that a word? Nothing particularly revelatory in that. I felt the same way about what, you know, was touted as the first Happening. I didn't think there was any particularly revelatory thing in that. There was but I didn't feel at that time that there was any. I looked at it. It was a good exercise, but where did it fit in theater terms I didn't –

**MEH:** So, you saw the sort of things that Betty and Pete were doing with the Light-Sound-Movement Workshop and what now is touted as the first Happening as being more exercises than theater per se?

**WH:** Yes.

**MEH;** From the perspective you were coming from.

**WH:** Yes, that's right. From that perspective. I now feel that there probably – that I probably absorbed that stuff and then projected it into additional – Because as I moved forward, or moved circularly, which is the way things go, that they probably had – that they undoubtedly had some effect. But I can't trace the precise, you know, and say that this is – "I used this and you use that." Because that – Merce's stuff was, of course – I found Merce's material with the dancers was always profound. Again, I drew on some of that with The Pool-Sacrifice.

**MEH:** What was The Pool-Sacrifice?

**WH:** The Pool-Sacrifice was a Noh play in which I used some of Merce's dancers one summer. And used something I was terribly interested in at the time, which was what is the minimum that you can do to move or to project and still make theater. And I thought it was very valuable. To me it was very valuable to work within a very limited movement complex, context, and see what happened. Based on, you know, the sense that the most projective thing in theater is a cat walking across the stage with a minimum amount of movement. Your eyes would be riveted on that.

**MEH:** What were other ideas that you were exploring, as you tried to –

**WH:** Always with space. I was always intrigued with how to relate to spaces, so I'd move these stages arou – or forget the stages, and move people around in different places in the dining hall, outside, wherever – move or to explore different relationships both within what people were doing on the stage and putting them and the audience. I had a lot of different – Or interspersing people in the audience, like with the Faust Foutu, of sitting – there were two rows of benches and people sitting, doing things – that the actors and the audience were interspersed.

**MEH:** Explain from the beginning how Faust Foutu was staged. Do you recall?

**WH:** Well, what I remember of it is that we had two long benches in a narrow room. I can't remember where that narrow room was, but I think it was in the administration building (INAUDIBLE WORD), and people were just here and people were here. The actors – I don't know how they were interspersed at the moment, but they were interspersed with the audience. Then as they spoke

they got up, or they didn't, you know. I think that's so. I don't remember that that well.

**MEH:** There was one play that you staged just within a circle, wasn't it – people reading? Do you recall what that was?

**WH:** I don't know. It might have been the Zukofsky or – I'm not sure.

**MEH:** What do you think the influence was of being introduced to the writers – people like Duncan and Olson with respect –

**[END OF AUDIOTAPE 1, SIDE 2. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2.]**

**MEH:** What do you think was the influence of your being associated with people like Olson and Duncan, people who had real interest in theater as well as their own poetry?

**WH:** I didn't feel a great deal of influence from Olson on theater. What was I thinking? I was going to modify that. Oh. The only thing that I can directly attribute to Olson was his suggestion that I look into William Carlos Williams' A Dream of Love. And that was nice. That was a good, that was a very good direction, a very good suggestion. We did work on that. I mean there was a lot of reading of that and working on it and feeling our way through because that's the way in which I worked is that there's nothing sacred about a script, but you do have to find out what it is that's there. You have to find out – it's a mixture of what you bring to it and what is there that produces the theater. So, I was just as much interested in what people brought to it, and developing that as I was in what was the thing that was being said and what William Carlos Williams was, and who, and why, and what comes out of this. As a matter of fact, this was – if

on the one hand I said "space," I would have to say on the other hand the major, major, interest was in what people brought to it, and developing that, and finding out – so – without mixing into their guts, with leaving them alone in a sense, in the sense of psychologically leaving them alone but finding out a way in which they emerged through this material. So I got – in shorthand I said afterwards the reason why I never continued with theater is that I got much more interested in what was happening to the people than I did in the material that was extraneous to the people. So, I went off into areas where I would be immersed in working with what was happening to the people rather than to trying to pull the material, the external material and people into one whole, which is what you have to do with theater – or what I had to do with theater. But anyway the major emphasis than was this sense of looking at space and seeing where it led you and the other one was in this emergence.

**MEH:** Did the dining hall work as a theater?

**WH:** Did it work? Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Very much. Very well. I found it was great. You could do anything. You could do anything you wanted in there. I thought it was a good place. But that's not the only place we did theater. We did it in other, you know, various other places.

**MEH:** Where?

**WH;** Well, as I say, the Faust Foutu we did in some other room where it was long and narrow. The Medea was done in the study hall, downstairs in the study hall. There was a room that was down there. The Zukofsky, I don't remember where we did that but it was – well, we kept rehearsing that until we decided we'd

finished, and different people got involved in that. That was a very interesting thing to do was just to have readings. We didn't have to have the same people there all the time, but you kept reading that same piece, or parts of that same piece, because that was a fascinating thing to do as far theater was concerned. But it was in wasn't production. I mean so that there's a lot of non-production – a great deal of non-production stuff that went on, and yet it was produced, it was made at some point.

**MEH:** Were both of your sons born before you came to Black Mountain?

**WH:** No, I have three sons and two of them were born at Black Mountain. One of them was born later.

**MEH:** So when you arrived, you were childless.

**WH:** When I arrived I was not only childless, but wifeless –

**MEH:** Oh I didn't realize (OVERTALK)

**WH:** Well, that is separated at that time from Bea. We had separated in Philadelphia. We were living separately for several – for half a year before that. Then in the second – Let's see, I came in the fall, and then I guess in the spring I went back to Philadelphia and came back with Bea in the spring.

**MEH:** And your first two sons were born at Black Mountain.

**WH:** The first two sons were born at Black Mountain. The youngest was a little baby when we left. Yeah.

**MEH:** Where did you live?

**WH:** First, we lived in Minimum House, and then we lived in Roadside until it burned down.

**MEH:** You were sharing it with the Fiores when it burned down?

**WH:** The Fiores were upstairs. We were downstairs. That's where he lost a lot of paintings. Then in – I don't know what the name of it is. It was a separate building by itself, very small, and I don't remember what the name of it was. We lived there after that.

**MEH:** When you came to the college as treasurer, what was the financial state of the college at that point?

**WH:** Well, it was on the way down. It was in pretty bad shape. We always kept inventing ways in which we could continue. That would seem to be the major occupation was to invent ways to do creative bookkeeping so that we could move – which meant that there was no maintenance, things like that. Maintenance had stopped by then. We were depending on the work. There still were work crews. There still was the work emphasis. I think Jack Rice was the work coordinator at the time. So, there was still some work going on that people did, but it wasn't very much. It wasn't really major stuff. Well, at the same time there was I think – I don't know – just when Paul came back and did the Science Building, construction was going on, but maintenance had stopped. The heating and the money the next step of it prior, that is to say, they had stopped – When I went down I think in the spring or in the summer of '51 or '50 or whenever it was, they were heating by coal. By the time I got there, that would seem quite clear that they weren't going to – they could no longer afford coal to heat. That's when they cut – I'm saying "we" but it was they – I hadn't gotten into that yet – starting cutting wood. Then that's what we lived on was

woodcutting. Then came the necessity to sell part of the property. That strange invention of which I was I guess part of, but I think it was Leser's idea, of putting away half of the salary in an account and paying half. Then the (sad ??) and so on. It was pretty dismal really. It started bad. It wasn't – I think that's one of the reasons Don Warrington left (LAUGHS) because there wasn't a great deal of – it wasn't the full reason. I think he was well on his way, you know. He had other things to do.

**MEH:** Do you think there was anything – Well obviously if there was anything at that time that you could have imagined, you would have done it to pull the college out financially. Why do you think the college took the downward turn?

**WH:** Oh, it had already taken the down turn. It didn't take it after I came. It had already gone.

**MEH:** No, I think it started about 1949, right in that period.

**WH:** Yeah. [AFFIRMATIVE]. Well, it lost its purpose. I mean it lost, it lost its – It had lost its original purpose and couldn't find a way – and was trying to find a way to change into something that was closer to – that was post-Bauhaus ways of adapting to the society. It didn't have the same unique – It didn't have the same function as it had prior to that and hadn't found a way in which to attract people to the function that it was trying to become. So, although it partly lived on its old reputation, it had become a new thing. There wasn't any way – and we didn't find a way to articulate that properly. I'm not sure it was just the sense of just articulation. I don't think that it had the function, the uniqueness of function that it had previously. What do you think?

**MEH:** I don't know. I think there were a lot of things. That's the important point, that it had changed its function. Also the times were very different. (UNINTEL). But also I think that even without the lack of money that there was a very different attitude in the earlier years toward things like the work program, and maintenance – not necessarily things that cost money, but just the time that went into maintaining the campus. The people in the fifties just weren't interested. They had inherited this work program but there was no longer any real interest in being a Progressive school, so to speak. Do you think that's true? Do you think that's erroneous?

**WH:** Yes, I think that's very accurate. It was not that interested. We were pushing the Beat Generation, they were pushing it to that sense of alienation rather than the kind of affirmation that preceded, this kind of affirmation of discipline and the kind of thing that – the social graces – that had preceded. The social graces as personified by Johanna and others who could do lovely things, were able to – Attractive. Gracious. We didn't have that as a value.

**MEH:** Looking back, how do you feel about that situation? Do you think this was good or bad or –

**WH:** I don't, I can't tell you. But when something's kind of inevitable I'm not sure that you can assess whether it's good or bad. I just feel that that's where it was. Yeah, it was good and bad. It was certainly bad in some senses and good in others, but it was kind of inevitable. It was what it was.

**MEH:** Did you really expect – Olson was trying to formulate a different schemes like the institute plan –

**WH:** Excuse me.

**MEH:** Olson was trying to formulate different schemes, like the institute plan. Did you really expect those to succeed?

**WH:** No, I didn't. I didn't expect them to succeed. But I felt that that was – At the same time – Well, maybe that's too sweeping a statement. I didn't expect that grandiose a scheme to succeed. I did think that it was possible that one a slightly different scale, institutes could succeed. Or might be able to succeed.

**MEH:** What do you recall about your collaboration with Duncan on the Medea play?

**WH:** Well it was for a course. We'd done two things by Duncan before he came the last time, the final time. And I enjoyed tremendously this fantastic ability that he had, finding all kinds of words all over the place and all kinds of images and ideas and so on all over the – I did talk with him about doing this. I don't know who originated the idea, but I loved the idea of having him work – us work in front and him back there writing at the same time. I liked it very much. I thought that it was very stimulating. Unfortunately, or fortunately, a lot of my memories of that time have been now strained through a piece that Eloise Mixon wrote, and I brought you a copy of that for your interest. It would be the equivalent of interviewing her.

**MEH:** Okay, wonderful.

**WH:** She died and she for a long time was very eager to have this published. I don't necessarily agree with all of it, but I don't know which points – I don't want to challenge anything. I have to depend on a lot of things. I have to depend on your book, and I have to depend on other things that are written, to remember

things. So this I've depended on to remember some of the stuff. But I felt that it was very electric. Good, good (UNINTEL WORD) talents.

**MEH:** What was Duncan like as a person, as a writer?

**WH:** What was Duncan like as a person and a writer?

**MEH:** How do you remember Duncan?

**WH:** Oh, he was a fascinating conversationalist. He could just pour out lots of – everything he was thinking and he had very wide interests. I know that there was – or there seemed to be not a great deal of rapport between Olson and Duncan. There seemed to be some rivalry, but I think that's well acknowledged. I think constantly, when I think Duncan, of something that Eloise mentions in here which is that his ability to be attentive to everything that was going on, and intersperse – and this is true. He could be doing four or five things at once. He could be writing, he could be carrying on a conversation, he could be observing something else, and it was – his ability to do that was outstanding. That was number one. Number two, that I was fascinated with is that he had, more than anybody that I know of, a direct connection with a very deep stream of images and history, his own history and experiences and images and words. He had an unlimited tap into this vast reservoir of stuff that was in his past or in his experiences. It was unlimited. He could go anywhere, to any moment, any time, in his past and pull out stuff. That's overwhelming.

**MEH:** How do you remember Olson?

**WH:** Well, in a vast variety of ways. He was a person who – I was very fond of him personally. I liked Olson. He was very irritating, too. He was annoying, because

– he was purposely so sometimes (LAUGHS). One of the annoying things was that he had no sense of his size. He was a huge guy. If you'd sit at the table with him – we had square tables – you'd best not sit next to him because there was no way in which you and he could sit there, because he didn't know where he ended and you began. So, just avoid sitting next to Charles. I think that that was very typical of Charles. He didn't know really where he ended or where his limits were, his physical limits, maybe other limits, but certainly his physical limits were. I don't think that his internal sense of his size bore any relationship to his external sense of size. I had a sense that maybe he was a much more modest size internally – that he didn't understand where he fit. The other thing was that – I don't know whether he was nearsighted, but partly because of his size and partly because of his sight, he always tried to – I mean he towered on people, sort of pushed them back. I've seen so many people just move slightly back. Also his closeness was more – it may have been because he had just come from Mexico, where people are closer physically. There's not a – there's not as much disturbance to another individual if you stand – So, this first while, and also I think even after that, his being close, people backed it off. Had to back up. Normally those are important in thinking about Olson and what his effects are on people, certainly what his effects were on me. At the same time he was very, very generous with his time, his efforts, his attentions. Very generous.

**WH:** He'd spend hours writing to obscure poets or people, talking to them in rather vital ways about what they were doing, writing. His big fascination was – I

guess maybe this is part of that, part of his influence on me – would be his sense that you had to look very carefully for the origins of the energy, where it came from, or where the original – he was always eager to find out where the original energy was or the original impetus came from, where the source of the stuff. So, that led him back into anthropology and that sort of stuff. Certainly in terms of even single words. He wanted words that had roots on them, and he wanted to find the roots. He wanted to find the roots. That had influence. Thinking about that (INAUDIBLE).

**MEH:** Speak up a little bit. Your voice is getting so low, I'm not sure it is going to pick up.

**WH:** But anyway, he had that.

**[END OF SIDE 2, AUDIOTAPE 1; SIDE 1, AUDIOTAPE 2 BEGINS]**

**MEH:** So you were talking about – We were talking about Olson.

**WH:** Yes, we were. You think you got what I said on the tape?

**MEH:** I think so, but try to keep your voice up.

**WH:** Well I don't have much more. The personal intimacy was very close, so it was with Connie and with Betty. Betty was more my student than anybody. She came as Wolpe's student, but she spent more time with me than with him or with – in classes I'm talking about. So I knew Betty very well and knew Connie and was very much torn up with this whole business of Olson's having to decide, or putting himself in a position to have to decide what he was going to do.

**MEH:** What effect do you think this situation had, both – as a personal crisis for him and on the college.

**WH:** Oh, it shocked the college. Well, it finished what had already been started in the way of the decision, that had to be made, to close it. It was only one – It was one factor in a bunch of factors about closing the college. It was a fairly important factor. His whole life was shifting around, and he had to make a major adjustment. And he did. So, that helped. But in the meantime other – you know – nobody else wanted to teach either. It turns out I was the last teacher. I was the last person who was willing to put on a class. Joe didn't want to do it. He wanted to paint, but he didn't want to teach. Olson said he wasn't going to teach. But he didn't want to do that. I was left. That's the reason why we went into Black Mountain – I mean into Asheville – and sat down, had it kind of out, at that time, saying, "If this is the way it is, we must close it."

**MEH:** It would seem just from – even more so in the interviews that I've been doing on this trip – that during the fifties a lot of the students were really into pretty serious drinking and more exploring personal life and problems than academic work. Do you think that's the case?

**WH:** Oh, I think so. I think so. I think that's what was happening.

**MEH:** How did the faculty react to this? Was there any effort to – ?

**WH:** They were doing the same things.

**MEH:** So, everybody was in pretty bad shape.

**WH:** [AFFIRMATIVE] Yeah. I think psychologically it was not the greatest. At the same time, you see, there was stuff coming out. But that was, I think, you know,

no different, I think, from what was happening in the society outside. Very little different than what was happening in the stratum of society outside, that was close to the stratum of society that was inside the college. It did that to those personal relations, and into alienation, and into where do we go next, and how do we get there. Where does society go? So, I think that was par for the course.

**MEH:** How do you remember Robert Creeley as a person?

**WH:** I guess a withdrawn sort of guy. I liked him very much. I thought he was a very good guy. But he was kind of – you always remember him as "dark." Not only dark-haired, but also internally dark. Gloomy. Had some gloomy aspects to him. But, you know, a good Joe. I think that most of the time that I spent with him was on the Zukofsky play. He participated. This is one thing that we participated in together. I think he was interested in that, understood what I was getting at, which was that Zukofsky sings with one voice. So, that he has a lot of characters, but if you worked at it long enough, you realized that it's a single voice being carried on by a whole bunch of different people, so that if you pick up, if you say one line, you pick up the tone, not necessarily the verbal tone but the tone of that in the next line, and so on. So, that it becomes a whole which you make this way. I think that he appreciated understanding that (LAUGHS). I thought I revealed that to him which he hadn't seen before. Little things. Anyway, that was his – That was the one place where, as I say, we worked together. Otherwise, we talked together. We saw each other. I saw what he was involved in and he saw what I was involved in. But anyway, dark.

**MEH:** Are there other people that you have particular memories of? Images of people that stand out?

**WH:** Well M.C. is a prime example, her creativity.

**MEH:** How do you remember M.C.?

**WH:** (OVERTALK) One of the reasons – I remember her a number of different ways. The first way was when I first came – before I came, was when she – One of the reasons I think I was there was because – that I wanted to come back – was because of M.C. This beautiful twisted face. It was very – And Bill Levi, with his strange mask. They were the two people with these great masks. Then others also – I saw things like masks (LAUGHS) on other people and wondered actually what the conflict between the masks were. That always intrigued me. Then her fantastically generous nature of pouring out her heart and enthusiasms and her intelligence into this vessel which was Black Mountain College. So, that had a lot of influence on my sense of what Black Mountain College was and always have – I don't know how long you want to go on with this stuff.

**MEH:** Well, we'll run out eventually. Are there aspects of the college that we haven't discussed that you feel are important? To you.

**WH:** Oh, to me! I work it over periodically, so there will be aspects to infinity of stuff that is important. Putting it in perspective, as far as I was concerned, it was not – as it apparently is to a lot of folks who attended and were there – the definitive experience, the major definitive experience of my existence. I had had several before and several after that that match the influence and excitement of

Black Mountain. But within its own context it was important and relevant to my later experience.

**MEH:** When the college closed, what did you do?

**WH:** Well, gathered together all the folks that were in Medea and came out to work with Duncan here in San Francisco. I had two friends who – former, one previously former, from Hedgerow – who had The Playhouse on Beach and Hyde. They said we could use their facilities to do rehearsals on the second play. We continued on that, four or five of the students, as you know, and myself – until Duncan became thoroughly enmeshed in the local poetry politics and wandered off. Two of the main, one of the main – well, we were all main. One of the people wandered off and got into drugs and whatever. So that sort of thing, you know. But that was exciting while it lasted – for seven months.

**MEH:** Now, you were still – This was a Black Mountain College project, wasn't it? Weren't you still on salary at that point?

**WH:** No, not at salary. I was given part of my what-do-you-call-it, whatever that –

**MEH:** Contingent salary?

**WH:** Yeah. I was given part of my contingent salary as I left, in order to set this up. Then that ran out long before. That ran out very quickly in San Francisco where the prices were – And everybody had to find jobs here. I found a job finally.

**MEH:** How would you compare the experience of working with Duncan on The Medea at Black Mountain and the experience here in San Francisco?

**WH:** There wasn't – The first month or the first three weeks it was very good, but then from then on it was distractive. There were too many distractions running

around, and so it wasn't anywhere near the electricity that there was then.

There we were all concentrated and could see each other, see each other night and day. And here it was what? For three hours every few days. No way. So it was certainly no – it was nothing like that experience.

**MEH:** Do you have any particular memories of the summer sessions when you were there? Of people? Performances? Events?

**WH:** Merce's performances were outstanding. And his classes. I took a class with him. That is, for a while. So did Olson for a while, which was an interesting sight to see Olson try, with his bulk, trying to work out. He did. He stuck it out for a while. Of the performances, Katy Litz's performances of I Am A Woman was very fertile. [REQUEST THAT HE SPEAK UP] Katy Litz's performance of I Am a Woman, – I think that was it, but I'm not sure – was very very moving. Very profound I thought. David Tudor's productions – productions of Cage's – various things by Cage – I thought was superb and intense.

**MEH:** How do you remember Stefan Wolpe? What was he like?

**WH:** I remember, you know, so many different contexts. Stefan amused me a great deal. (LAUGHS) He did. He was very, I thought, very amusing. He was so immersed in his music that he would go this way and that way, just as he played, just as he worked on his music. He spoke in bursts. I did not like his – I didn't remember that he'd written for the Faust Foutu. Eloise says he did, and she said that it was out of keeping with the – Maybe so. I don't remember that. I don't remember his songs for the Faust Foutu. I do remember his material for The Good Woman of Szechuan, and I didn't like it. I didn't feel that he – But

apparently he was able to copyright those and have them used in other performances, but there was not, I didn't think that it was the proper music. He felt that he knew everything about Brecht because he'd been in similar situations and maybe he even knew Brecht, I don't know. Anyway, it wasn't – To me it didn't work. Anyway – But he did. He was amenable. Two of his students wrote music for a Garcia Lorca play, and I think he helped them. And that worked. That was a very – they did it very well. That was very good music. He was willing to work and he did work. I remember him working on that dismal time when we had the problem with the cattle, and he worked along with the rest of the people.

**MEH:** When you left Black Mountain and after the Medea project really closed down here in San Francisco, what did you do professionally? What have you done since you left the college, professionally?

**WH:** Which profession?

**MEH:** Well, all of them! (LAUGHS)

**WH:** At that point, I recognized most vehemently that I'd come to the end of that strain of thinking about theater and recognized that I was much more interested, as I say, in what people were doing in their preparation and where they were going and how they were getting there than I was in producing plays. I also had, as I may have told you – when we were at Black Mountain had visited several times to the Cherokee reservation in Cherokee, North Carolina.

**MEH:** No, I wasn't aware of that.

**WH:** Oh, yeah. I'd visited there, because there were folks – there was a woman who I knew who was – helped direct the Cherokee drama over there.

**MEH:** Is that Unto These Hills, or something – ?

**WH:** Unto These Hills. I went over and was profoundly influenced. I mean I saw all along this strip Indian people, some of them chiefing, which is – I learned that "chiefing" is their cash crop. "Chiefing" means putting on a Sioux war bonnet and having your picture taken. I thought, "That's interesting." What does this mean? Disintegration or just the recognition that those folks had, that the people who were doing this have, that this is a legitimate cash crop. I could never resolve that. Also, I started to read and learn about the reservations and recognized that there were some problem here, there was some thinking about here (?). Prior to that, I had started working a little bit – and, as I said, my interest in masks and these people as masks – I had worked a little bit with some, a few people at Black Mountain on Tlingit face drawings. Face drawings based on what I knew about Tlingit face drawings. So, I said, "If I get a chance to, I'm going to investigate this. This is where I would like to go. This is what I would like to do." But I'd put that in the back of my head. When we came out here, one of the places when I went to look for work, when I knew I had to work, was back with the American Friends Service Committee. They said, "Well, the one place that we have is as a social worker with this house, Inter-Tribal Friendship House, an Indian center in Oakland." I said, "I want that." "But you're not a trained social worker?" I said, "Okay, then I'll stick around and if you find one for the price that you're offering, you go take it but if not, I'll just be around

and wait." I waited for about half a year, and they couldn't find – they didn't pay that much. So, I started as a social worker for an Indian Center. And that's been my profession then ever since then.

**MEH:** What is the name of the Indian Center?

**WH:** Intertribal Friendship House in Oakland.

**MEH:** You've been there ever since?

**WH:** I was – Well, no. I was the director – After being social worker for a year, the director left, and I became the director and was the director for about six or seven years, and then became – with the American Friends Service Committee – what they call the Community Relations Secretary, which means not only overseeing that but a whole bunch of other projects – farm worker projects, several projects in the city, redevelopment projects, et cetera. So, I became that. Then when I officially retired at sixty-five, I kept working for first three, then two, then one day a week, but then back with the Indian population – as a consultant to the Indian-operated organizations that had developed out of this Intertribal Friendship House. There are about six of them in the city, in Oakland and San Francisco, that are Indian-operated, working, and I was the – did a lot of consultation in that.

**MEH:** And now you had said – Did I just hear you say you were going to retire in a year?

**WH:** I just retired fully.

**MEH:** You're down to no days a week now?

**WH:** Yeah. As of the first of this year.

**MEH:** How old are you now?

**WH:** Seventy-nine.

**MEH:** Good for you. I hope I make seventy-nine. Thinking again, before I turn all this off, are there any particular aspects of the college? What were meals like at Black Mountain?

**WH:** When we first got there, we had people working in the kitchen. I didn't gripe about the meals because I'd been through – when I was in the Civilian Public Service Camp, our meals were really atrocious. We really had to stretch money tremendously. So, the meals were fine as far as I was concerned. They weren't that great as far as other people were concerned, but then there was continuous griping because it was, as you would expect, institutional food. Then gradually we couldn't pay any help. We got along a little while, with students cooking, and then finally every, you know, everybody took care of themselves in one way or another rather than – So, I didn't have any problems with the food.

**MEH:** Beyond the food, how do you think that mealtime functioned as a part of community life?

**WH:** Oh, it was the center of it, and that's what was – That was part of the disintegration. Once we didn't do that anymore, there was no centrality. That led to further dispersion and further involvement.

**[END OF SIDE 1, AUDIOTAPE 2. BEGINNING OF SIDE 2.]**

**WH:** Further dispersion of interest and further just self-involvement. I mean involvement with a few people that you would cook with or didn't cook with or – So, that was also a factor in sort of the disintegration of the centrality of the

college. So I'm eager to know from you some things. [INTERRUPTION IN TAPING]

**MEH:** You were saying that you presided at meetings as one of your functions at Black Mountain?

**WH:** Oh yeah. I was Acting, in a sense the acting director for quite some time, although I rejected being Rector. My experiences with being a director of the Civilian Public Service Camp had a profound influence on me, and I decided at that point I wouldn't be a director of anything anymore. I would not be the top administrative person in any organization. You get too separated from the people who – are people – and start putting, you know, putting stuff down on them. At the times when it was suggested that I assume the rectorship, I didn't. Each time I said, "No, No. We'd do better without a rector. We'll do better without that sort of thing."

**MEH:** Do you not think that the failure of anyone to be willing to assume that sort of leadership and responsibility was not just indicative of the problems at the college. I mean the college always needed some sort of leadership to do things, like organizing raising money and representing the college.

**WH:** Yeah. That was primary problem is that nobody – none of us – were eager or interested in doing the outreach that was necessary, that would be necessary for the college either in terms of raising the money or going and recruiting. I went on a recruiting trip to New England at one point, and as you'll see in these minutes, other people went on recruiting trips. But it was halfhearted. We didn't really expect to recruit very many people because, for one thing – One of the –

I don't know, which comes first, the fact that you're not certain of who you're – of what you're doing, or you're not certain of the precise niche that you're filling, or you lack students. Unless you can interpret – You have to interpret something and if you can't really say exactly what it is that you're about, contrast it, there's no way to interpret it. At the same time you have to go and get students in order to be that whatever. So it was sort of a loss.

[INTERRUPTION AND BREAK IN RECORDING]

**MEH:** So, anyway we were talking about no one's being interested in assuming that leadership.

**WH:** Yes. No one would assume the leadership. As you see, in these notes – I didn't intend to give you these because –

**MEH:** No, you can keep – I have copies.

**WH:** You have copies of all –

**MEH:** I was just interested, curious, about what they pulled –

**WH:** At any rate, there are, they are indicative of that – even in 1952 – how people did not want to assume leadership. They all wanted to do their own thing, and I think that some good things came out of that. But it was – it didn't mean an institutional – there was much hope then left for the college. Looking backward, you can see the downward spiral. When we were going through it, we couldn't see it. You didn't see quite that because we were talking about what we were doing, thoroughly involved in what we were doing it and hoping of course that somebody would come along that would take over. We kept trying to give it to different people and they wouldn't accept it.

**MEH:** I think it was a conflict at that point that artists always have in terms of their needing total focus on their work, but at this point instead of it being a personal issue in terms of paying your rent and keeping up your house and making repairs, it became an institutional –

**WH:** I was willing to – I was very willing, and I did, I – By default, I was quite able to and willing to do a lot of the work that had to do with administrative detail. But I was not going to front for the college in any way. I couldn't do that. That was not what I decided was in my role to do.

**[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE 2, TAPE 2]**

**[END OF TRANSCRIPT]**