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[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

MEH: [GIVES IDENTIFICATION]. Bob, you've done a lot of interviews about Black Mountain, and I don't want to just have you repeat yourself unnecessarily. But there will be—obviously there'll be some of that. Looking back to Boston, Cid Corman was really the first link, was he not, in the Black Mountain progression?

RC: Yeah. Cid would have put me in touch with Vincent Ferrini, and Vincent Ferrini puts me in touch with Charles Olson, and that's the crucial connection.

MEH: Did you ever read on his radio program in New York?

RC: Yeah. "This Is Poetry." I did indeed. I'd heard him just by, as they say, I think I wrote, I said "a fluke of the airwaves." I was living up in Littleton, New Hampshire, and I, you know, just literally a fluke of the transmission, suddenly was hearing—I can't remember quite who I was hearing, probably Richard Wilbur or someone, reading in this charming program with Cid the MC. And I got intensely and particularly ambitious to read on it also. And I had, you know, really published nothing at that point, very little. So I must have written to Cid care of the radio station, and I came down for a Boston Poultry Show, and did the reading and went back up to Littleton. We became friends in that situation, you know.

MEH: You were growing chickens then?

RC: Yeah. Not very—I loved the chickens. I mean it was—But hard to—I ate more chicken than I ever want to remember. It was, you know, chickens and potatoes and—what else did we have? We had something. And beans. We used to can a lot of classic yellow beans and green beans.

MEH: What was Cid Corman like then?

RC: He was a wild blend of—He was a bit—not paternalistic, but he was—he cast himself in curious ways as this steady, down-to-earth, locating, securing sort of friend. He was the friend that was going to make sure not so much that you, you know, did things his way but that you didn't fly off in some awful imaginative, you know, flight, et cetera, et cetera. He was—And he could be immensely frustrating in that emotional manner, and he was old before his time, so to speak. I remember he came up to visit us in Littleton. This was just about the time he was resolving on what he thought he could use in the second issue of Origin. So it was a big moment for me. My, you know, friend here is visiting, and the whole household is sort of waiting with bated breath to see what Cid is going to do. And the classic remark Cid said, “You know”—I think I must have asked him finally—"Cid, do you think you can use any of those stories?" and he said, "Oh yes, Bob, they're, you know, very, very interesting and good but," you know, he said, "I'm sure you'll do better." I mean—With Cid you were always quote "sure you would do better," which ahhh! You know, so it always took, without his intent, the kind of, the act of pleasure. I mean, to be told "Yes, that's very interesting but you'll do better," you know. From his point of view, I suppose he thought he was prompting me to greater and greater heights or something, but it was—It used to

drive me up the wall. But then some years later I remember seeing him—I had the wonderful pleasure of introducing Cid to Alex Trocchi, which was one of the most ex—not exp-, it wasn't violent or anything, but two more opposite people you could scarcely imagine. And Cid was aghast at what he thought was, you know, the sort of corrupt nature of Alex Trocchi's life. He was publisher—he was then the editor of Merlin. And Alex was completely—I said, "How do you know people like that?" you know, because Cid was so sober and so, you know, so—He was living in a room—Someone, a friend told me—I didn't actually see the room—he said it was like without windows. He was managing to save money from a Fulbright to continue the publication of Origin. I mean Cid has an incredible heart. I can't think of any friend or acquaintance who's stuck with it more than Cid over the years. He told me in recent correspondence that he's now written more poems than any person in the history of the English literature.

MEH: I visited him in Kyoto three or four years ago, and it was like a book a week club, his very own.

RC: I know. It's a bit stupid [LAUGHS]. I wouldn't dare say "Well Cid, who do you think is going to"—necessarily not—But that's not the—Cid's a writer. But a very different friend, but a friend who writes I want to say in an equal manner, is Jackson Mac Low, you know. Jackson, I mean, Jackson is not interested in the out—in the thing done, necessarily. He is, but I mean the point is his activity is composition, and so it's your problem as to what to do with all of that accumulates. [LAUGHS] And Cid, I think, is more, I think Cid thinks he's, you know, he's making little numbers. I don't know that aspect of his—I remember I

happily was of use to him getting a—He had some prob-, there was some family problem, his wife had glaucoma that needed operations, and they'd lost a rental. They needed some monies for transfers to another residence, and I happily, because of the American Academy I was able to get them some, you know, instant cash, money. And it was four or five thousand dollars, and Cid said, you know, "I need 75 thousand dollars!" I think—Let's start with this, Cid. You know. I mean that's again like "You can do better!" [LAUGHS] I'm—He's an old trooper, Cid. I mean, he's, you know, there are few indeed who can match him in terms of sticking with it and producing a magazine that over the years is probably as provident and accommodating of old and young writers as any in the business. Yeah.

MEH; What were <u>you</u> like then?

RC: [LAUGHS] Well, I could be emotionally very intense. Complicated. Quick to anger—not so much against a friend as Cid, but I was—not “scared money” exactly, but I was, I was, I felt vulnerable and therefore on my guard. So in sort of classic social circumstances, you know, bars, trains, whatever, any sense of restaurants, any sense of being sort of put down or put away would make me flare horribly. I mean, really unpleasantly, very unpleasantly. I remember Dan Rice saying to me once, you know, "Just cool it. Just calm down. You don't—You torque up. You get so intense so quickly. And it's hard on your company. They don't quite know what to do." I remember when I was a kid, it was—I had really to learn as best I could to hold my temper, keep my temper, and in some ways that,

you know, that emotional wham would be possibly of use, but there must be another way to do it. I'm quite quiet these days.

MEH: But there was the frustration, among other things then, of knowing who you were as a poet.

RC: Well, I didn't know who I—I mean I really, but I certainly, I got so tired of being put at a distance, like being put out with the garbage so to speak, or being—So everything had to be, had to be not just fought for, but everything had to be located, claimed, and somehow maintained. "Maintained" was a classic phrase of that time, and it certainly was what my life was after. At least—And then I was in a marriage that was, you know, ill-starred. It was—We married far—I married far too young. I was twenty years old, and my wife was six months older, so we, we then had almost immediately, you know, two sons and a daughter and another son who died sadly in [UNINTEL WORD] pretty much. But anyhow we were suddenly in a very complicated, real domestic life with a modest but—she had a small trust fund, but it was, you know, it was like 215 dollars a month, which even then wasn't a great deal of money. I mean, of course, we just had enough to stay in place in some, if we had a—if we had a house, whatever. But it was, I felt useless. I felt on the one hand absolutely delighted that that income gave me a chance to write, you know. But I certainly despaired at times of what would I, what could I <u>do</u>, you know. As the male, I wanted to do something I felt was useful. So I had this kind of, you know, semi-growing vegetables and stuff, but that was certainly not an economic enterprise. And the story of mine that best

gives you the sense of it is "The Unsuccessful Husband." That's a, that's a little *roman á clef*. It's a story about our—effectually transposed story of my real life.

MEH: Right. But you were—At what point did you start writing? Had you always written?

RC: I had started pretty much in college. And I really began to write basically stories at first. Not, not—Poems were fun, curiously, and growing up a kind of Puritan culture, one was always suspicious of fun, being, being, you know, being sincere, being really heartfelt or—If it were fun, it was somehow suspect. If it came too easy, you know. It took me a long time to realize that perhaps something's feeling easy is a positive rather than—You know, if the hat fits, put it on. If the coat fits, put it on. You know, I was having—The imagination, everything has to come through difficulties. I love that line in Olson. I wish he were here to ask him quite what he meant: "The blessing that difficulties are once more." That's a classic line of a New England conscience, you know. Yeah.

MEH: So you knew Corman, and through him you knew Ferrini.

RC: Yeah.

MEH: And then Olson.

RC: Yeah. Those were—Cid, I didn't meet until I came down for that poultry show. And Vincent, I don't remember when I met Vincent in person. It must have been some real time after that. And I didn't meet Olson for, you know, some—at least two or more years. Several years from—See we met—we met by letters, I want to say in the early, like, '50. And we didn't actually meet in person until I got to

Black Mountain in the spring of '54. He called up once to see what my voice sounded like. [LAUGHS]

MEH: In Mallorca?

RC: No, I was still up in New Hampshire. Yeah. [LAUGHS] You know, just to—And I thought he was much younger than he was. I mean, it wasn't until I got hold of a copy of Call Me Ishmael, some friend had said "Oh, is that Charles Olson the fellow who wrote the book about Melville?" And I thought, "I don't know. Did he write a book—" So it was, yeah, Call Me Ishmael. So I happily got hold of it and was just, you know, absolutely blown away by the brilliance and the intensity of that book, and the clarity of it. And I thought "God, he doesn't"—You know, but I did feel "He's a lot farther along than I am" in terms—not just in terms of being identified but in terms of what he could do. Yeah.

MEH: Now was it you—I'm not sure I'm remembering correctly now. Was it you that he sent a manuscript to and you essentially rejected it?

RC: Yes. That's me. That's right.

MEH: "You can do better"?

RC: It was sort of like that. I said he was “looking for a language.”

MEH: Right. Now I remember.

RC: And he said—Then he came back with a—Not peevishly, but he came back with saying "That's an interesting comment. What do you mean by that?"

MEH: Well, essentially both of you were looking for a language, don't you think?

RC: Yeah. I mean so at least I'd recognized what the rhetorical business was trying to do. And it was just—I was very—I was very Puritan in the sense that I, I was very

intimidated and wary of any kind of putting on of rhetorical pattern, although subsequently in our letters I'm endlessly sort of playing with typographical, you know, patterns and whatever. Somehow that didn't seem to be—But putting on airs was what I was curiously—Again, it's a New England business: people putting on airs was very suspicious, and very disdained. You just didn't put on airs.

MEH: Unlike the South. [LAUGHS]

RC: Yeah. Which is after all why Dorothy's curtains—[OVERTALK]

MEH: [OVERTALK] It's the life style.

RC: Yeah, I mean, its great ruffled curtains and—[LAUGHS] I remember once in a terrific shopping mall in Wilmington, North Carolina, it used to be fascinating to watch women who were primarily the clerks making change, because they didn't want to make evident that they really knew how to handle money. So "What is this?" you know. [LAUGHS] It was just incredible. [MAKES SOUND OF DEALING MONEY FAST]. You know, no way.

MEH: But actually you and Olson both had the Puritanical New England . . .

RC: Well, he was saved, though—

MEH: You weren't Catholic though.

RC: No. But he was a Catholic. That makes a lot of difference, just that both—not an iconography, but a, not even a particular rising symbolism, but a sense of a plurality. I remember Olson, some friend reading his papers in Storrs said they came upon a late entry in a notebook where he sings to—it's actually to avoid the Protestant single and to, yeah, to keep with the Catholic plurality. And that was

the dilemma for me, that the habits I'd grown up with were so insistent upon the sinner in the hands of an angry God, or the one-on-one relationship with God, which was neither particularly desired nor other than just very confusing. I mean, one had one—One had no sense of being with others. I mean, I think—I've been trying to write a preface for a selected George Oppen, and he's the most wild blend of kind of Puri-, you know, of being numerous. I mean that's a very Protestant remark, actually. And Charles—Then Charles has a—When George Oppen writes his one review in his lifetime, it's an anonymous review, and Charles's Maximus Poems is one of the texts, and so he really questions what he feels is the dogmatic tone of the poem, its preachiness and fingerwagging, blah, blah, blah. And I can understand. It's one of the early Maximus, and he feels, you know, you know, that Olson is being very pedantic in the address to the people. But somewhat later—Olson has a lovely line where he says something about how to open Mr. Oppen, you know, which is [LAUGHS] right on the money, you know. But anyhow, that is the difference. There are—I can't—You may have the social behavior of a quote-Puritan-quote, but it's very hard to be Puritan and Catholic, because the Catholic keeps sort of leaking, puzzling out. One of the classic writers of the moment, Fanny Howe, is a very interesting person of that, of that—I mean she comes from an old—You know, she and her sister Susan come from a very old sort of classic New England pattern, but their mother was classic, you know, Irish. And the—especially in Fanny, who's now joined the Catholic Church again, et cetera, it's not at all a case of piety or blur, it's just "How does one get out of oneself?" which the Puritan or the Protestant Puritan

has an incredibly hard time getting to the world that's otherwise there. I mean, he or she is extraordinarily—And I found that, echoes of that, in Williams to some extent, and D. H. Lawrence, that—So you get—Puritan writers are often very very, I mean, wonderful about the physical terms of the reality, because it's—they're just pressing their noses to the glass with such fury, you know, to get to it, you know. "Where did I go wrong?"

MEH: So going back to Black Mountain, you started this incredible correspondence with Charles Olson.

RC: Yeah.

MEH: What—Now, I mean the correspondence is there to be read. Most of it, to a certain point.

RC: Yes.

MEH: How did that matter? What was the importance?

RC: It mattered. It gave me almost a daily company with someone who was extraordinarily both—not just brilliant but provocative in the sense that what he, what he set one to thinking about was just wonderful. And the, the directness and intensity and range of information he brought was just glorious. I felt in some ways not—I remember once—I don't even know what prompted it, but I wrote him an answer, you know, sort of in rhymed couplets or something, which he then said, "Never do that again," or something. But I didn't feel—I felt I was talking to a friend. I didn't feel, you know, "the Master." That never really was part of our relation of we were particular friends. I mean I was—frankly I was able to be, help him in ways that he had difficulty, and he was certainly able to help me in ways

that I had difficulty. So we were—I felt very secure in his friendship and very, and very, you know—I felt useful. I felt like I certainly was able—Like he was very shy about public readings. He needed a lot of—not comforting but securing. He also, he used to box himself at times in terms of publication, and he needed someone to take a look at this and tell him whether it, it had any—was there anything he was missing, or was it—Anyhow, he needed—- I remember once, at Black Mountain, I'd gone up to their cottage, that was when he and Connie and Kate were pleasantly there, and he'd been writing the night before or something and just said "Oh here, take a look at this and see what you think." And I thought—I knew the one thing he was asking me was not, you know, to advise him but just to tell him what I thought. So I read it, and I must have said something like, you know, "This beginning is terrific, and right through here is wonderful. But right here I think it gets, goes off a bit. Something's not right here, and then it picks up and it's fine again." And I remember—Then Connie and I walked down from the college to get the mail at the main building or whatever, and she said, "How can you talk to him like that?" And I said, "What do you mean?" And she said, "If I said that, he'd blow up." And I said "But what he's asking you do is say that. Not to simply have a judgment, but to have a response that he can read." And that's what we seemingly had, and it worked. Toward the very end of his life he wasn't—he was—he was not happy, at all, and he was very confused. After Betty's death—I almost can date it—he had the, you know, the relation with Panna which was certainly—that was complicated I think for both of them. But I think she acted responsibly as did he, in a curious way, but John Wieners was

extraordinarily hurt in the whole business. And then he—The one thing Charles did not feel comfortable and was sort of being, being kept, which unhappily that relation seems almost to have necessitated. [STATIC]

MEH; So you were talking about his relationships and being a kept man, essentially, in the later years?

RC: Well, not that he was a kept—In the relation with Panna, it was simply the case that Panna had a substantial income from, you know, from her family's provision, inheritance, and that she effectually lived in an impressive manner, high style, the Nash, you know, place they had in London, in the classic Nash circles, incredible. I mean, it wasn't simply grand, but the whole design and the authority, its classic elegance, blah-blah-blah. It had nothing to do with how it was furnished. It had to do with the factual architecture. The sense that they could go to the Connaught Hotel, one of the kinds of incredible old hotels of London, and Charles would order the whitefish and stuff, and to walk in—It wasn't that the staff of the hotel—I mean, Olson was ever <u>with</u> anyone, he almost without exception brought them into his company, and they almost always loved him. I mean, I actually saw a waiter quit after he realized Charles was now leaving—in Vancouver. This young guy was working for the Faculty Club there, and I think he handed in his resignation when he realized that no longer would there be this person to serve, you know. [LAUGHS] Because he had the table in the Connaught, we went—Kitaj and I went—wanted to take him to dinner, and Kitaj had suggested a classic old garage restaurant in London that was—had very good Indian food, and Charles said "Well, you know, perhaps we'll go to the Connaught and have

fish." I remember, and Kitaj went sort of white, because it was such a pukka, you know, high social place. So, off we went. That must have been about four or five of us. And it was now late for dinner, and we came in around, say, 9:30, and the place closed at 10. But the manager said, "Oh no, no. Come in, Mr. Olson," and we're walking down the hall, Charles has his arm over this fellow's shoulders, we're given this comfortable table, the service starts. At one point—The rest of the restaurant is sitting waiting for its bill, at tables—Every restaurant—Every serv- Every waiter in the place is at our table. Everyone. And they're talking with Charles about the Marseille deck and the Genoa deck, you know. They're all Italians, as a matter of fact, so they're talking about the particular Tarot deck and the meaning in Italian of the words, et cetera. So he was an immensely attractive presence. That used to be very pleasant to be in his company.

MEH: What about at Black Mountain? What was he like then?

RC: He was—He was certainly—He—Realizing that my time there is not a—is not a very—is not a measure really of what Black Mountain was like, because it—For two reasons. One is that I came just as the place was beginning to sink deeper and deeper into despair, and that the economics of the place were getting absolutely, you know, awful. And so also the numbers had shrunk to the point of, you know, so that it was—The whole Dining Hall, that had all been closed down. Aspects of the buildings that were used were in some ways derelict. I mean, I slept in a room at the very end of the Study Hall that had one of the—you know, one of the large plate glass windows was cracked. They had cardboard over it. I mean, Dan Rice and I kept the furnace going. I mean, it was—I remember

Charles and I and Wes Huss pulled the—compacted, you know, sanitary napkins out of the main drain to let the—I mean it was, there was no longer an active relation with the farmer. Finally there was—It was just—we were just sinking into—in some ways, not so much even despair, just no money, and trying to think of ways to stimulate some kind of interest, people to come, blah-blah-blah. And those who did come, curiously most of them really thought it was great, but it was a desperate time, and his attention and even his availability were so dominated by that condition. He was wheeling and dealing as best he could, trying to get support, trying to think of angles that would work, stuff like that. So, I don't remember him—And I was also drinking a lot, so that would blur memory to begin with. But I don't remember him as being particularly—He wasn't at that moment particularly active as a teacher. He was very active as an administrator, and he, for example—We had one approaching semester, I remember, where no one, literally no one, enrolled, and people went ahhhh, you know, so Charles said, "We should still have meetings," you know. We should, you know, think of what we would teach if we had someone to teach or something." [LAUGHS] That aspect, I thought, was wonderful. I mean, I thought he's, yeah, he's really, he's absolutely for real. And I was teaching, I was teaching, I guess, not the courses in some framed way that he might have taught, but I was effectually teaching the writing situation, and therefore he wasn't. He was freed to do other stuff. Yeah.

MEH: Who were the students then?

RC: Well, the ones I remember vividly: Mike Rumaker and Cynthia Homire. Don Bird [PH]. Jorge Fick was a very particular friend. Jerry van de Wiele. Martha, who

becomes his wife. [Probably the Martha to whom he refers is Martha Davis, who becomes the wife of Basil King.] Those are the ones I think of quickly. Then Betty, before she and Charles had, you know, made a public declaration, as they say. Tom Field, very warm memories of him. Let's see, who else? Terry—I wanted to say Terry from Providence, Rhode Island. Terence Burns. Joel Oppenheimer, whom I really knew outside of Black Mountain. Ed Dorn, whom I knew both in but also much more particularly later. John Chamberlain—classy friend of that time—who was sort of—wasn't even—couldn't even be called, certainly couldn't be called easily a student. I mean, he and I at first sort of faced off because of various complicated relations to Dan Rice. And I was particularly stalwartly, you know, with Dan, and John had every reason to be very irritated with Dan, so that was a contesting—So in any case, the, we became, yeah, very close friends subsequently—even at that time. But on and on. There are a number of—Fielding—Fielding I knew outside—

MEH: For a school that had no students, you had some interesting students.

RC: Yeah. Yeah. Naomi, who used to fall asleep in every class. She was terrific. When she was asleep, the whole class—[INTERRUPTION]

MEH: So that was a pretty good group of students. But students have told me that they essentially had to pull you out of bed in the morning.

RC: Grey—Is Grey talking again?

MEH: What?

RC: Grey Stone. Did you talk to Grey Stone?

MEH: I haven't found Grey Stone. Do you know where he is? I've tried.

RC: That's too bad. The last time—The last, he was living in Indiana somewhere near Fort Wayne, actually. Out on the—He was working as a potter. And I had come to read in Fort Wayne and he happily showed up.

MEH: Maybe I can find him then.

RC: Yeah. He was determinedly working as a potter.

MEH: Everybody was pretty much in despair at that point, it seems. [OVERTALK] Of course, everybody was having his crisis.

RC: Well there couldn't have been more than thirty-five people in the place, and there were three attempted suicides that summer. That's pretty spooky. Yeah. Both faculty and students, yeah.

MEH: I think there's sort of a—Black Mountain was becoming—well, it has its phases, and was sort of the thing. It's sort of an attempt to gloss over, you know, the real sort of turmoil that the college was in in every way at that moment.

RC: Well, I've just seen the catalogue of Vincent Katz, which actually is wonderful. I mean, in terms of the particular take on the art and the re-—It's a wonderful job. And so the—In the narrative, let's say, of his—he has an essay—he has an essay by someone involved with the music, and he has an essay with someone—He does the art, particularly, which he does well, very well, and then the—called Martin Brody or something does a piece on the music. And then I do a piece particular to Olson, and then there's—Kevin Power does one on the literary associations. So—But as you say, it gives you a, it gives you a kind of library-like record, which is terrific. I mean, if that's what you want to know who was painting, what did it look like, it's wonderful. But if you're wanting to know

what the emotional terms of the place were, or what they had as social ramifications, or how the place interacted with its surrounding community, that really won't get out. And the longer—I thought the earlier book of Martin Duberman's, which might have been more of that perspective, really isn't there either. I mean, it's still a very, you know—But the—Also it's sort of like a movie that begins with something flying in over North Carolina, and suddenly you begin to see the ramifica—You know, where it is and how physically it occurs in this place, and what the social terms are, and how people, you know, do this, that, and the other in a common day, and—Did you ever find this wonderful student, Harriet, from—She was Canadian. She's there when Elaine is there, who'd come from Trenton [It is not clear who Harriet is.] Last names—But Harriet had come down from Toronto. I remember I picked her up at the railroad station with the pick-up truck. She had this classic luggage, you know, to go to college, and these great steamer trunks and stuff, and she was dressed very, very, you know, freshly. And she and I actually looked terrific. And I remember I put her stuff in the, you know, in the truck and off we went. And as we came in through those gates, she just started crying. She couldn't believe. She just said, "Is this it?" I said "Wonderful people here. Don't, you know, don't mind that." And she just broke down crying. She said, "This is—" you know—"My teacher back in, said it was the greatest art school I could think to go to." Come on! And within, I'd say within say three or four months, she was one of the most particular and persuaded people in the place. She was—I remember her acting in this wonderful production of Genet's The Maids, which was just terrific. I mean, she

became utterly particular to the play. And so that was always interesting. There was a whole range of students who, like Grey Stone, dear Grey Stone, whose father had been a—was involved with sort of the Tennessee research program involved with nuclear fission (fusion?) and all that. His father was apparently a determining physicist, and Grey was really a loner and a very—again, a very bright man and a very displaced one, when I knew him. I mean, you know, not sub-social, but he was trying to find a life in this curious abstraction in which he lived. On the one hand, he was a very local kid, but he was, on the other hand, his family seemingly were just—had nothing to do with the local population. You know, it'd be like the son of a scientist in Los Alamos, you know. You know, brought up in the whole Chicano relationship, but you're not really part of that at all. Yeah. So I think you can find him therefore in quite local circumstance. [LAUGHS] I think that's what he really was hungering for.

MEH: Going back to the early part of, before you actually went to Black Mountain. You left New England and went to Aix-en-Provence?

RC: Yeah, we had—We had—For example, we'd married. My wife sold a house she had inherited in Wellesley Hills—Wellesley rather, not Wellesley Hills, and with that money we bought this small farm. Actually a lot of acres, but small kind of classic cape up in, just outside of Littleton, New Hampshire. So we moved ourselves there from the Cape, where we'd been living in North Truro. And after college we'd gone there to live for a while. I had this old friend, William Slater Brown and his family sort of acted as a bridge. And then we became—We had local friends, who became quickly decisive in our patterns. Then we found

this—A friend of my sister's had this property in Maine, or rather in New Hampshire, he was wanting to sell, and so that's how we happened to find it and buy it, and it didn't turn out too happily—just that about three or four years later he decided he wanted it back, you know. We had missed a payment, and he just took it all back. Yeah. So at that point we moved—We'd followed Mitch Goodman and Denise Levertov to where they were living in Provence, just—They were living—Just outside of Aix. They were in living in Puyricard [SPELLS IT] and we were living in a little town just down the road. It was really just a block of houses, row houses, called Fontrousse, and we lived there for a year or more and then we moved to Limbaix, which is up a bit to the north, yeah.

MEH: You were writing then.

RC: Yeah. Desperately, yeah. I remember one awful moment when I asked the family to please step outside of the one room for communal possibilities we had whilst I finished my great story "The Greats," you know, which has to do with a heartbreaking, you know, familial pattern. [LAUGHS] They all sat on the edge of this dusty road [LAUGHS] while dad, you know, finished his great work. Yuck.

MEH: So at that point, who were the people that you and Olson and other people like Duncan and Blackburn felt you needed to separate yourselves from? Who was, if not the enemy, the Establishment, or the—

RC: Well, I can do it most simply by locating sort of folkier magazines of authority. I don't recall having any particular animosity against say the particular editors of the action of The Partisan Review. Some of them I liked. Olson had problems with Paul Goodman. I really didn't. I thought he was terrific. We had a friend in

common, Jacob Leed. You might know Jake Leed, who—Bob Leed I'd known him as, and he became later Jacob Leed. And he was good friends with Paul and introduced him to me. And then Paul also was crucial in relation to Joel. I mean it's—The Dutiful Son—I remember Paul really looked it over and gives Joel a very positive response to it. And I thought it was a very bright—I liked his writing. And he is a—He was—I invited him to be a contributing editor. But he, you know, usefully said "I'd—Rather than have a function, I'd like to just send you stuff." So he was very good to us. And I mean, there were relations which were certainly independent of Charles, Dahlberg being the classic. When I first met Dahlberg, I anticipated some immense, you know, contest and fight, but perversely he became a peculiarly supportive ally. Not a—You know, it had nothing to do with Charles. It had to do with my life and my marriage and living in Mallorca. I think if it had not been for Dahlberg, I probably would not necessarily still be there, but he certainly got me out in a hurry. You know, my wife really wouldn't—She hated him, absolutely. I can well understand it. They were instantly at each other's throats. Terrifying. But the—Let's see, what am I—The people we wanted to—I guess the status quo we had problems with—I'm not going to say we—I had problems with the—The classic attack on Dylan Thomas [LAUGHS], which was—We were attacking the support of Dylan Thomas. I don't think any of—I certainly admired Dylan Thomas's, like The Ballad of the Long-Legged Bait and Map of Love, that incredible collection of stories and stuff. But it was the—it was the securing—not so much of his reputation, but just this is making him a static benchmark for, you know, if you want to write, young man, this is your obvious

model. I mean, just sort of compact and make everything a didactic frame for what writing might be. And it was very happily done. Oh, Hol [PH] and I have been friends now for years, but if one goes back to the end of the forties, early fifties, Don writes a piece for a magazine called The World or something, it was a British, you know, sort of like Harper's-like magazine. And he's being asked to comment on the state of American—The World Review, I think it's called—on the state of American poetry, and he, you know, he says it's, you know, it's entirely derived from Eliot's practice and that's it's foundation and that's it's authority, and there are these few benighted fools who are following Williams. But it's a dead end, you know. And he names—charmingly—we got our names in print, at least, Olson and myself, for following, you know, this dead end—Williams. So—But, you know—But Don certainly changed his mind as the years went by. Well, it was the kind of classic schoolboy remark, you know. Here's what's in, and here's what's out. And he wrote in good—I wrote a letter to the editor in protest, which they printed charmingly. But we were, yeah, we were really suspicious of invested authority, as anyone who's stuck outside, so that the magazines like The Hudson Review, we were—even Pound's being involved with it didn't persuade us it was—You know, we thought it was kind of yuck, you know. I remember one classic remark—to give you some kind of feeling for it—would be—One time, Martin Seymour Smith—we were, you know, in Graves's apartment, and one of us had, possibly Martin, had had a little magazine he'd just had some poems in. And Graves comes down—he was a kind of early kind of terrifically teasingly humorous man at times, and not at all malevolent—and he looked at Martin, and

he said "Oh, what, Martin? Slumming again?" [LAUGHS] We wilt, completely, our vigorous determination. I mean, after all these great crusades to change literature blah-blah-blah, I mean The Black Mountain Review circulated—something like two hundred, 250 copies, 300 would be good. So the sense of changing the world was that, you know, it was fantasy beyond belief. I mean, we had no idea that it would have any effect whatsoever. I don't think we were whistling—But we—In other words, we were doing it for our own dignity and interaction and clarity and self-respect. So—And we hated those who were given that kind of possibility. We didn't—I mean, I had no interest in being published—I finally was published in The Kenyon Review, which was a classic journal of that authority. Quite benign, in fact. It didn't—it wasn't out to kill you. Nor was Accent, for example. But I remember getting a story in that magazine, and then the issue came, the great moment, and I look and see my story there, and I look at the company and it's like a great various debate and discussion of the New Critics. Robert Lowell has, you know, The Mills of the Kavanaughs. I mean, you know, I'm completely out of place, you know.

MEH: I think that really comes to my next thought. There was a lot of talk between you, or maybe—I think I remember—I didn't make this up—and Olson about The Black Mountain Review as a means to give you a coherent voice instead of this dispersed voice, where, you know, somebody publishes a little here and somebody publishes a little there.

RC: We wanted it—Well, see, Cid—back to Cid. Cid had given us an av-, you know, not just a vehicle but a gathering point that stayed, that stayed—You know, again,

Origin is a very physically modest magazine. It's not going to grab much attention on the local bookstand at all. I mean it's a [LAUGHS]—I remember, yeah, the green and yellow that I got was terrific. But forgetting all that, it was a viable means of putting ourselves on the record and having a way we could exchange our various activ-, activity as writers very simply. And find a company. That to me was absolutely terrific. And Cid was the one to, really to do it, and so then we thought that—The only lack, the lack I felt in Cid's publication was that it didn't really have much reflective room. I mean, it couldn't—it didn't have much space for, not just review but a kind of critical agency that would say "There's a good book here. Check this out." Especially thinking of Olson. That was one—in those letters—that aspect of him was as powerful as his writing. Steve Fredren [PH] for example says that both Olson and Robert Duncan, that they are essayists of the classic authority, as with Emerson or Montaigne or whomever. They are great essay writers. And to have a vehicle that doesn't quite—isn't able to locate and use that. See, a great thing about The Black Mountain Review, in retrospect, was that it did have, you know, that incredible piece by Carl Jung, like a hundred-plus pages. I mean, we could go hog-wild with this. And Cid did eventually. I mean Samuel French Morse, for example, a piece on Stevens. But I wanted something more. And he began to do it too. But that was one reason. I thought the more the merrier. No one was dumping Cid to get to The Black Mountain Review, as far as I remember. We were trying to make a kind of consortium of active small, little magazines that could act as a gathering place, and that was, that began to happen with Merlin, for example. But—I saw, it was in the Gryphon Awards,

literary awards in Toronto this early summer, and you know one of the books that's been nominated for the prize to those persons outside of Canada is Christopher Logue's Homer, his Iliad. That is a really incredible piece of work, especially because he doesn't know any Greek. I mean, it's a fantastic invention, and it's a pure—you know, it's an incredible act of poetry, that book. It's a great one. And I mean, I have an absolutely dear pleasure—I knew Christopher Logue when he was, you know, we were all about—I remember Alex Trocchi saying, "Everybody in the world must be twenty-eight years old," you know. [LAUGHS] And we all were, and it was just Wow! You know, it was wonderful.

MEH: Well in the end, if you put all of the publications together, Origin, your press—

RC: Yeah. We should include things like Golden Goose, which is certainly there, which—a whole manner of things, like Goad, which has at a little sort of subset title "A Stick Used to Prod on a Recalcitrant Beast" [LAUGHS]. I mean there were all manner of—They were wonderful. You know, some of them lasted three or four issues, or, like The Black Mountain Review was seven issues. But the—It was terrific.

MEH: But it did, just if you look at Jargon. I can never remember, is it Divers?

RC: I just pronounce it "dy-vers." Like diverse.

MEH: I always get it wrong. They did, if you take the totality, if you look at them all together, they did give you a coherent voice.

RC: Yeah. Yeah. And that, paradoxically that, that, those modest beginnings didn't so much secure the world, but they really gave us a place to be. I don't think—In subsequent discussion of all this, there—you know, certainly there are those

who, not malevolently but in terms of contemporary viewpoint, presume that Charles and myself—I've seen Libbie Rifkin's book, Career Moves. Ted Berrigan and Louis Zukofsky are extraordinary instances of careerism. [LAUGHS] It's—I mean, it's like you may—one may have an emanation or disposition that one is in no wise aware of, or one may even be doing something that one in no wise recognizes as the case, but I—And if—Ambition, absolutely. Ambition to write and contest with one's peers the authority of what can be said and how it can be said, that, you know, that's never stopped for a moment, even when we were sleeping. But it had nothing to do with being famous. I love that sense of John Chamberlain. He told me once about his first wife, which I've quoted endlessly but it's worth it, always with a—He said, you know "She said she wanted to be a singer, but she really wanted was to be famous." [LAUGHS] And there was a lot of writing in magazines which had to do with being famous, and we really weren't into being famous as far as I remember. I don't think any—I just wanted to be published, you know. There'd be things like later the Fiction Collective wasn't into being famous. It was a cluster of prose writers. Their enterprise, Sun and Moon, was not really interested in being, having, you know, just making its authors famous. It was interested in publishing them, which is always I think most interesting, you know.

MEH: You were also totally outside of the academic establishment.

RC: Yeah.

MEH: Sort of finding your way through a wilderness.

RC: Well, I was thinking, I had a younger friend who'd gone through the so-called Poetics program at Buffalo, who's from South China. He said his progression in going to college in this country was like A-B. He went first to the University of Alabama for his B.A. Then he came to Buffalo for his Ph.D. And he's teaching at Harvard. And he says he tells his students, charmingly, that if they want to be famous—or, more accurately, successful—what they should do is drop out. [LAUGHS] And he gives as instance, charmingly, me and Bill Gates, which is [LAUGHS]—Otherwise, who knows what would have happened, you know? And the—There's an interesting discussion, Robert von Hallberg, pleasantly, in an issue of a fledgling magazine, <u>Bridge</u>, is writing about me as fact of the avant garde. And he tack-, not tackles, but he brings this point in about how—He's fascinated by how it is that someone who's so publicly and insistently <u>outside</u> the academy should be, perversely and interestingly, brought into it. I mean, it's as though—not every time they throw me out they bring me back in, but it's, it's—I've served something. And it's nothing—I was thinking—it must be some emanation or some rhetorical base or something inherent in the language and in the social address that makes this possible. Because again he says, unlike many of my peers—e.g., Denise or Gary or many—my location as a writer is not based upon any political or social habit; it's not based upon regionalism, even though New England, whatever. I mean, it's based upon the practice of writing. I mean I'm most identified, in terms of a person writing over the years, as the <u>way</u> I wrote. I'm not, you know, I don't embrace—I'm not Carl Sandburg, you know. I'm not, you know, et cetera. I'm not George Oppen, blah-blah-blah. I'm not just plain

Bob, but I'm fascinated by the way in which words say things. But I'm not—I think that's why the Language Poets first took to me, so to speak. But it's also what's made it impossible to, to finally accept—to not accept, but to take me in, you know, because I'm not really doing anything finally quite like that, you know. I'm not that, I'm not that intellectually conscious when I write, so to speak.

MEH: Why did you start Divers Press?

RC: Because it would be possible to publish, again, texts—I think—Where was the firs—We first published—We get to Mallorca, we discover there's this extraordinary comfortable facility of handprinting, wonderful printing, and I think I, probably I'd just had a small book published here in this country—Golden Goose—and I thought it'd be nice to have some authority in what one could bring out. The magazine—It was like the next step after a magazine was to have some kind of ability to publish books of whatever kind, to have the authority to say, you know, here's a book. And so I think—I at first tried to work with Martin, but Martin expectably had a much more, you know, would have a much more English orientation. And our first book was, charmingly, his mother's poems, with a pseudonym, Eleanor Fern [PH]. And I published a book about Handbook of Fancy Pigeons, so I did it too. But we decided it would be happiest for all concerned if we separated interests, and if and as Martin had something he thought was terrific, I would certainly hope to publish it, Ann and I. It was Ann who was—It was her money. So we began to publish books. And we began The Mayan Letters, for example. That was a classic instance. That would certainly not get published otherwise. Or, I think of Paul Blackburn's, both his translations

Proensa, the first draft of those, and the—Anyhow, there were people we thought would really be interesting to publish, and myself included, obviously. Yeah.

MEH: And The Black Mountain Review. Actually, I mean, I can read your correspondence with Olson then. But remembering, what—what was the real impetus?

RC: What it was—I loved—There are two sort of things. I loved the, I loved that way of almost not so much having a dinner party but that way of putting things together and getting various information as a complex. And I loved that. I loved that arranging sort of possibility. I loved editing. Sure. I had tried it but without any success, because of the whole failure of the printing mechanism, when younger. But now was a real chance to. And the, the limits of Origin were beginning to be irritating. I just, you know, it's as though kinds of exchange or range were curiously not getting into Origin. And we couldn't really fight with Cid all the time. That would be absurd. But just wasn't getting there. And I was interested to open the base of prose, for example, and to make—I thought of the kind of a, not a critical section in a literary sense, but, you know, a kind of wide, almost journalistic criticisms that would—I remember, I was negotiating, as they say, with the, oh God, the ex-sheriff of one of the classic Chicago, you know, the county that's involved with Chicago. It was to write an article about procedures of rehabilitation and sentencing, in that purview. So then we were really trying to get it out of the—And I think that, you know, that extraordinary piece by Jung [LAUGHS] was far from usual literary, you know, concerns. But—So we were trying to move it off the simply literary pattern and to have it, not to have it a kind

of Letters to the Editor. I wasn't remarkably interested in that. But where bits and pieces and so on. I think—You know, the magazine that fascinates me presently, I think is an excellent magazine, is Brick, which Michael Ondaatje is one of the editors for, and his wife, also a novelist. Linda Spaulding, et cetera. Michael Redhill. It's published in, yeah, in Toronto. It's an excellent magazine. It has such a range of information. And it's not a potpourri, but it's—it's seeing things from a more than either simply literary or simply potted magazine. Granta has some of that aspect also. So that was, those were—There were other magazines of the time that were particularly involved with political and social thinking that were interesting. Trying to think of how to engage that world, as well, in quote—in literature, you know. And again The Partisan Review had certainly done so, with very firm clarity at times, even though one—you know—didn't have to agree with them. They certainly were taking on the political terms of the world. And Merlin was a classic. Merlin had excellent sort of engagement with political factors.

[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE 1, TAPE 1; SIDE 2 BEGINS]

RC: —student representative for Nader's interests. And he also does deejaying well, and so he had—He wrote for Phaedo, which is a classic sort of upscale magazine for black middle-class sort of young persons on their way up, who still have strong interests in music and—Yeah, he was writing for them very comfortably. And that I was moved by, that he can move not just phony but can move through cultures with good nature. And he was in what's called the Gallatin program at NYU, which is a self-determined program, so he—This summer we was working for FAIR, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, as an intern. He

managed to get a cover article called White Noise on NPR, which is just terrific, and there's a wonderful moment where he called up on impulse the Washington office of NPR and asked to speak to Kevin Klose, the CEO, and lo and behold, Mr. Klose [LAUGHS] came to the phone. Just to say, "Why do you have no persons of color on these primetime—?" "Well, you don't understand, we are—Our demographic base shows a lot of support from [UNINTEL]." "Well, that wasn't really the question," you know. It's a very—Anyhow, he's—He's now burned—I mean he's not burned out in the sense he's going to die or something, but he's in that awful lame duck end of college, where all the action has really been accomplished. You know, you've taken the tests for law schools, you know, things to do. Yeah, he'd like to be able to trace things back to where they, you know, where they conform, and so he's hoping to—He, you know, did well in l-—He's a very sweet man. And Hanna is, I think, trying to—Not trying. She's hesitant to say "I want to be a fireman" or something. She's in the General Studies program, and she's, she really seems to be moving toward a complex of art and business. I know she has a real pleasure and a capability in art, but she doesn't really want to make it her life, you know. I mean, she doesn't have that whatever it is that really compels people, obsesses them and so on. But she's fascinated, and she also likes the not how to hustle and make a million but the interface. She likes the public. She likes that. So she'd be—NYU's actually has got very good curatorial programs, things like that. We'll see. She''ll probably do something quite otherwise. Yeah.

MEH: So, going back to Black Mountain, what was the bond between you, between you and Dan Rice?

RC: [LAUGHS] It began by being, we were both in love with Cynthia for a time. But I, I was very moved by his—I thought his painting was excellent and still do. And I thought his sort of tenderness, his brightness—He was not so much a leader in some macho—but he was—he was an extraordinarily defining and resourceful person. He was very attractive in that. He was—he was looked to for sensible advice and opinion, and he—I think at times it was hard for Joe Fiore, who becomes the teaching, you know, the person teaching art in the last years, because Dan was in some ways the emotional person you went to, or the one who seemed to have not just the experience but the—but the guiding capability. And it wasn't that—Joe was more tentative as a teacher. Less—He'd just married. He was, he was—But Dan also had at that time in his life an extraordinary recognition and approval from his elders, like Kline and de Kooning, particularly, and he worked then for some years for Rothko. But I mean he was, you know, he got that very complicated sort of accolade or that judgment from elders that he was obviously the one who was most likely to succeed. I heard a great story, incidentally, about Cy Twombly, which is really sweet, that apparently when Motherwell went down to Black Mountain to confer with the art students, the two studios he didn't check out were the two, you know, were Cy Twombly's and Robert Rauschenberg's. [LAUGHS] I don't think Rauschenberg was remarkably—But Twombly was particularly disappointed, because in some ways said that that was really why he was there, the hopes to meet Motherwell

who's his extraordinary hero. And to be somehow weirdly passed over and not attended at all—I mean, didn't even ask to see anything, apparently—was very confusing to him. And so apparently there comes the last day or so of Motherwell's visit, and he gets up his courage, because he's very shy, to ask Motherwell how it is that he's not had interest or occasion to take a look at Cy Twombly's work. And Motherwell says "Well actually I have seen your—I have looked at it." And he said, you know, "My advice immediately is that you are in the wrong place. You are far, far beyond your company, and it's awkward for you and for them to have you here. I mean, you shouldn't—this is not your place." He said, "In fact, if you're agreeable, I'd like to arrange for you to have a show at my—," you know [LAUGHS], "gallery." And Twombly's taking this in and says, "But I'm not ready." And he said "That's it. You'll never be ready. That's what—" [LAUGHS] "That's what makes your art so terrific. It's always has that kind of wonderful tension of just getting somewhere, and it's—You're great." You know. So I thought that was a—And having met him, there's a kind of not a boyishness about him—I met him years and years later, and he charmingly said to me "I thought you were much older—the way Olson spoke of you." [LAUGHS] Because we were only, you know, a couple of years apart. And that kind of curious freshness—not just "Today's another day. Up and out," you know, to greet the morning sun. But that kind of—not tentative, but that kind of edge of both curious and feeling something still moving, you know. Not like wham, wham, wham. It's just terrific. I think he's a terrific artist. And I love that story about him. Yeah. But Dan, unhappily, I think perversely and unhappily, was taken in immediately by his

elders and sort of treated like, you know, "You're the one that's going to do it." And it was not easy. It was awful—it was kind of uh. And the drinking was very hard. John was—Chamberlain was, not more practical, but I mean he got to New York—Dan, you know, sort of used Bob Rauschenberg's studio and was otherwise very broke and drinking and just not in good shape at all. John comes up with, you know, with Elaine and the children and manages to get a reasonable place to live and gets support by working part-time as a hairdresser, doing classic, you know, design and dress, so he's paid well and that gives him a means to get started. But there's a kind of sort of, kind of curious—There's been a lot of emotional argument between Dan and John. And the point is that—One time I remember being in John's place, must have been in Santa Fe. I want to say something like that. I knew that Dan and John had had this sad dilemma vis-à-vis Elaine. And so it was very—And I was surprised to see this extraordinary small painting of Dan's on the wall. And I said, "That's a really interesting painting of Dan's you have." And he said "Yeah, it's the best one he ever did. I painted it." [LAUGHS] Which was "Okay John! Back off!" I mean, that's, you know, that's—I mean John is a very, very good painter too. You know what I mean. It was a funny, extraordinary world. John's very happy these days, I think. He's not as—He's not as—Vincent apparently went to see him. They didn't have a hard time with him, you know "What are you doing here?" or you know. "Aaah. Who are you?" you know. But he's, the times I've seen him were wonderful. I saw him at the Herron Museum in Indianapolis that was a show of four Indiana artists. And he was terrific. He was frankly—They were asking him

"How do you do your work, Mr. Chamberlain," and he said "Well, you know, I had this salad here I'm eating, that's how you do it. You get this—" (?) You know. And they said "Aw, you know, all right" and he said, "I wish you wouldn't put this masking tape around the outside of the sculpture to indicate where people—" You know, anyhow. It's just—He was bored. And Bob Indiana was there. He was very intent and terrific, but—And then What's His Name, whose name I've sadly mistaken at the moment, who—John's comment was "Anybody who talks about spirituality at breakfast has got to—" [LAUGHS] We were riding back and forth in these cabs were driven by classic old-time black, you know, cabdrivers, men and women, and John with that company is just glorious. I mean, the humor, the clarity, the instant recognition of one another. It's just—Yeah, because he grew up in, you know, Rochester. Just completely at home. Completely, you know, yeah. I think his wife is an extremely—much as—is extremely much as Dan's. They both found very good women [LAUGHS] who are very, very dear and not just respecting but very very—I mean, I did too. All of us. We didn't deserve it, but we found these extraordinary dear people. Yeah. Turn a leaf, yeah. It feels great.

MEH: Yeah. If you consider where you all were at one time . . .

RC: At the least. Yeah. [LAUGHS]

MEH': What was the—Just everybody's drinking so much, was that—

RC: I don't know what that was all about.

MEH: Attempt at suicide?

RC: It certainly tasted not exactly good, but it certainly brought great rushes of emotional, you know, Ahhhhhh, great blurred ecstasies of—This is also

extraordinary—- I was thinking of talking to the pleasant people about Mickey Ruskin. I remember when Mickey literally brought me home from that restaurant, you know, slobbered, vomit, and I was horrible sick, and it was extremely generous of him to pick me off the floor sort of. But, I don't know. I think it was a) an inability to handle alcohol; b) a kind of wanting something to happen, wanting something to, you know, bred of a kind of curious frustration and emotional ah-ah-ah. And I think drinking too, at least in my case, dealt with insecurities and shyness and all the classic social—It made me feel confident, you know. Two minutes later I'd be, you know, wanting to kill somebody, but that [LAUGHS]—there was this passing moment that was terrific.

MEH: What do you remember about the automobile accident at Black Mountain?

RC: Ohh, I talked to Mike—

MEH: [OVERTALK] Do you remember it?

RC: Yeah I do. I remember my version. And in Mike's story, for example, he—He was outside. I mean, he was the first one really there, and he recalls that I was in this absolutely sort of fraught babbling state. I was talking about, you know, some relations with Ann, my wife, and some really freaked-out babble, which is—I mean, I could understand what I was saying, as these reports—But his sense was that I had provoked the accident by teasing Tom. But I don't remember it that way. I mean, you know, not in self-defense, but I don't—I don't remember it that way for many reasons. I don't remember it that way—To begin with, I don't remember it that way, and I don't remember it—it doesn't make sense to me because Tom and I didn't have that kind of relationship. I didn't—I was not, I

would not—My sense is I would not have teased Tom, whom I really liked a lot, as a person, as they say. We'd been in that Williams scene, that first-class of mine incredibly, whom I recognized as being vulnerable, in the sense that—What I found so wonderful in him was this sort of not off the top of his head but this forthright, this absolutely innocent forthrightness he'd had. And I wasn't being condescending to that. I was very—I loved that. I thought it was extremely terrific. He was also a very good friend—he and Mike were very close. And I remember I published Tom in <u>The Black Mountain Review</u>, so it's not, you know, you don't think "Heyy, you know, what kind of nerd is this?" I think—No one was really drunk. It's—He's just got this car, and the car's, you know, fact of money he's got from the fact of the death of his parents, as I remember. So there's a sense of weird desolation. He's got the car but, you know, it's sad. But now—And he's got his license. He just got his license. So he's driven us over to Asheville ostensibly to go drink beer somewhere, and we ended up drinking this near beer, green beer, and got, you know, extraordinary diarrhea but not much else, and we're now headed back to, back to, back to Black Mountain. And my memory of it is Dan is really bowed [?]. It's been an awful afternoon, and he really hates the way—Dan prided himself on driving, as he would certainly tell you, and he's—whatever <u>my</u> conduct, he's—I remember him getting out of the car, you know, and the doors swung this way in those—And he's standing there and he says "If you ever drive like that again, I'm gonna kill you. It's a horrible way to drive." At which point Tom went [MAKES SOUND] and off we went, and the door swung and pushed—threw Dan right back into the car. And then we hit the

chimney, and Dan, being the widest, really, was—there were no seat belts. He just went up and whammed on the back of the thing. I, I realized later, dislocated my shoulder. I did it just a year or so ago, so now I recognize what this bump is and all that. But that's what I must have done. And I went to a doctor [UNINTEL] nothing broken and so—But anyhow, so—But who knows? I mean—But it could have been me, but it just doesn't feel right. I don't—There were, you know—I mean I wouldn't tease Mike, for example, certainly not at time, nor I would ever. And I wouldn't tease Dan. I would contest. But Tom was so damn vulnerable. You wouldn't tease him, as far as I would—I had teased Jerry van de Wiele, but I got a broken tooth for my trouble [LAUGHS], which I—And he was completely capable of defending himself. Tom, paradoxically, wasn't like that, but he was—he was vulnerable, and especially with his new car, for Christsake. He was just taking us to the—So it just doesn't ring true to me that I did it. And that—Not Mike, but somebody else—Jorge and—Fick was in the car, and also, let's see, there was four of us. So it's me, Tom, Jorge, and Dan. And so he remembers it very—You know, it's—I don't know. Tom never seems to have felt that way, which was a great relief. I mean, Tom doesn't think I was out to get him and didn't thankfully remember it as such. Yeah. I mean, I happily saw Tom later and could ask him. But Mike is—still feels that that's what happened. But I can't, you know—It offended me, coming from Martin Duberman, and I wanted to know how it had been the case and then it turned out, well, there were four people and this was the poet and seemed the most coherent, so that's all [UNINTEL]. So, yeah.

MEH: It seems sort of—however it happened—sort of typical of sort of the demonic energy as [OVERTALK] the tension at the college at that point.

RC: It was—They were awful.

MEH: The drinking and so many guys and—

RC: Yeah, something was going to happen, whoever provoked it. I mean it was—people were just living on the edge endlessly, in a very meagre resource, and were, you know, with some real exceptions were—Like Bob Hellman, certainly very equable and dear man, you know, tried to commit suicide and thankfully contriving it so that he doesn't, you know, which is very wonderful that he did. And Grey Stone, just driving off into the, you know, with the—I'm trying to remember—the really bright black actress from New York? Which was, you know, they just zap off in his truck and have an accident.

MEH: I don't really know the Grey Stone story, I don't think.

RC: Yeah. Well, it was curious. It was like just toward the end of that summer session or whatever, and they just sort of—It was an exotic pair, not because she was black and he was white, but she was like the City Girl Actress, and he was like the Country Boy Tom Sawyer—Huck Finnish—Tom Sawyer, more actually. And so they were an unexpected couple. And then I think, as I recall, the truck smashed up, but they didn't—nobody got killed or anything. But there were endless things like that. Oh gosh, who was it? Tony Landreau's wife was very ill, and, you know, she was mentally having real prob-, schizophrenic, classic, you know, faces in the sky. It was just—And the poverty, the grating absolute poverty of it all.

MEH: But what did you do for food?

RC Oh, boy. Well, Dan and I at one point were living, sharing resources, living on five bucks a week. I remember Jonathan saying charmingly that he could, you know, much as he might respect it he could not ever do that, you know. He just [LAUGHS]—Which is, you know, it's nothing to be proud of. But it was also—Anyhow, shoplifting, you know, and getting enough to eat, you know.

MEH: Do you think that had there been more money—?

RC: [LAUGHS]

MEH: No, go ahead.

RC: Oh no. If they—Had there been more money would it have been different?

MEH: Yeah. Or do you think that people were just in such—the people there at that point were just in such a state of crisis it would—

RC: I think they were in such a state of crisis. It was like the whole thing was winding down with this sort of hysterical emphasis, and it's like watching this whole thing seemingly absolutely headed for ultimate disaster and no one has any means to stop it. I mean, on the one hand, this place is beloved. I mean, people who were there really <u>love</u> it. I'll speak for myself, but I think it's an extraordinary place, just incredible. But we can't get anybody to come, you know, and the frustration of seeing no takers, again and again and again. So it's not only the daily economic grind, but it's also the vibes of the time, the hostility toward any such enterprises we are a fact of—I mean, it wasn't just our situation that was having this experience but, you know, almost all the experimental schools of that moment were having the same dilemma. But some had it in a more not comforting but at

least in a less, in a less dramatic—And then we had of course all of the abrasion with the local community. We were, you know, Pink Mountain, Nigger Lovers. I mean, we were—[LAUGHS] we were utterly in the wrong place, at the wrong time. We were, you know, the community was just aghast that this little cluster of absolutely, you know—"Go away!" you know. So I know that the people in the college had problems getting doctors to deal with their dilemmas. I know that after that accident, it was curiously hard. And Tony's wife was pregnant. That was hard to find a doctor who—It wasn't that they were broke. They just weren't our kind of people. They just didn't want them around here. Riff-raff, trash, get 'em out of here, yeah.

MEH: Were you able to write in the midst of all of this?

RC: Seemingly. At least there were some—Yeah, things like, God what is it? All That Is Lovely in Men was basically written there, and with those—And then the book with, yeah, a book with Dan's drawings. That's from that time. Yeah, so I was—I don't think that this was quote good for my writing, but it certainly argues that writing has its uses at times [LAUGHS] of emotional upheaval. I think probably one of the most particular—Well, there were several, the particularizing poems that I've—is that, what's it called.. Oh God, I can't even remember the title of my own writing. Mmm. "A Dream"—"A Form of Women"—"A Form of Women." That poem was very particular to Black Mountain—sort of walking out in the night and the sense of immanence around. It was—I remember I was there trying to think of ways in which to, to re-gather, in—a funny way to put it—but in a classic male manner I'd gone back from the first-time stint at Black Mountain and told Ann that

I was in love with Cynthia. You know, thanks a lot. [LAUGHS] So she in turn fell in love with someone, you know, et cetera, as always. She was "Two can do that." So now I had returned to Black Mountain, because I don't think she really wanted me to stay where I was, and so—And I was—anyhow I was back in Black Mountain, and I was trying to think of ways in which not to win her back but how could we get—because, you know, our children and many—and her—but it was just, it was ridiculous, impossi—But I would write various poems about—But that, "A Form of Women," is particular both to physical Black Mountain and the sense of dilemma I was facing. And that comes into it. I mean Mike gives another side of it when he says I'm endlessly talking about it, you know.

MEH: "It," being your dilemma with Ann.

RC: Yeah, right, and the loss of children and the whole, the whole—Not, no certainly not that that money was—you know, what would I do without it? Did thankfully very well.

MEH: Do you think there are other things we haven't talked about that are really important to Black Mountain? Why did people—I've just been reading the new book on Black Mountain, and I was reading the music essay, which I think is pretty incoherent. But at the end he talks throughout this about the inchoate, inchoate—am I pronouncing it right?—curriculum. I mean I think his article is pretty inchoate. But then in the end, it's like, it's almost as if mystified. He quotes Stefan Wolpe saying, you know, "This place is dying and I just love it"—essentially. [LAUGHS] You know, like nevertheless—

RC: It was a kind of sweetness of decadence. Like the Baroque period, you know, the dying fall.

MEH: It's sort of like "I can't grasp this." This is how he felt.

RC: I know that it has a kind of reflective openness and permission that probably is not ever the case. If a place is thriving or reaching or moving toward some defining moment, it's impatient with what distracts it, with what impedes it, with what contests it, and it's very, you know, it's very—It's hard if you don't—See, I don't think Stefan ever had the—maybe I mistook him. I liked him, very much, but I don't think he had the kind of American sense of purpose and frontier. I mean, his was much more reflective of society, and he moved in it not, you know, the old days—Although he did have—I remember he used to tell us about great lawn parties they would have in Switzerland and how we were all a bunch of boors and how, you know, he used to have this terrific iron furniture, and people wore these terrific clothes, and they had these terrific people bringing them this terrific food, and [LAUGHS] we'd "Ah, wow, those must have been wonderful days for you, Stefan!" They were, you know. We were impressed. It wasn't—But he'd say "Oh, but their manners were so exquisite, you know. The things would come and go off of the table, and no one would bump anybody else, and the"—anyhow, just wonderful. And so I mean his—It wasn't—But he was not involved with the—with the kind of "we are the last first people." I mean to Stefan, that's—I mean, he and Olson actually had a very defining and terrific friendship, so it's not quite true that—Stefan was extremely moved by Olson. And Stefan was very moved by the—But his own imaginations of the world really had to do with the far more

defined and sustaining, sustained culture, you know. He was a classic old-time Jew, and he was putting that together, and it wasn't—it wasn't coming up with the kind of push that, say, Olson or the rest of us might have been involved with.

MEH: And that sort of "push" [OVERTALK]—

RC: His was an old voice. In that way he was different than—I always thought he was—I knew Cage only afterwards, and Merce, but I mean Stefan was very different than that pattern. It wasn't that he was better or worse. He was just very different. And his music was European, you know—like Ernst Krenek and that. Yeah, yeah.

MEH: There was a real sense in your writing at the time of trying to find what was not just a voice but an American voice.

RC: Yeah, well I—But not to—Because I was American, you know. I mean I was asked recently to write a piece for a really curious [LAUGHS] State Department sponsored book that a friend had been editing on, you know, American writers qualifying what they feel being American means to their writing. It's an interesting question. So the title of the essay I wrote, I gave the title "America's American," you know. [LAUGHS] In a funny way, that's absolutely true. But there's a kind of to me a wistfulness and a distance and a sense of not confusion, but very, very insecure sense of social and communal place, you know. You don't have a sense of the artist being, you know, brought forward through time and space, you know, as part of the company of the communal movement of the culture. I mean, you know, we were in, god, where were we, we were in St. Petersburg actually, sort of mid-July and, you know, it's in a battered and pretty hysterical state, but

walking through endless streets of resonating not just, you know, Nabokov lived here or whatever, but it's so dense with the cultural employment of artists, really, in all manner of situations both, say, Communist or Tsarist or whatever. And so there's nothing—there's nothing here of that kind. Nothing. And I don't know that—I don't know that it would be my pleasure personally if there were, you know, because this is such a weight of our, you know, of past.

MEH: In the second or third grade we had a visiting speaker at Chantilly School in Charlotte, and I've never forgotten, because I objected. I was at that age. She said that American culture could never equal the great cultures of the past. And I was like seven or eight years old.

RC: Wait a minute. Yeah.

MEH: Something inside of me just said "No." I've never forgotten that. But you say being American is being American but being American was always measured against other cultures. You know, compar-—We are compared to, instead of—

RC: I know. It was always as though you should have been here, you know, forty years ago.

MEH: Right. Or do you measure up. How do we measure you? We measure you by—

RC: No, we're the—As Olson said, we're the last first people, one of the substantial instances of it. I suppose people are endlessly the last first people, as they come and go. But we would seem to be, like the Canadians who brought, who were c-, not content to be, but who would stay Canadian, or British colonial, for a long time and then go into a very interesting, you know, complex of other—e.g., on the West Coast, just think, you know, Japanese and Chinese culture, blah-blah-blah,

but equally on the East Coast all manner of then European coming in. So Toronto's one of the great cosmopolitan cities. But New York, I mean, you get off the airplane at Kennedy and get into any cab and it's right off—or bus, really—the drivers are speaking Swahili or something [LAUGHS]. But, you know, it's instantly—There it is. And to say—So the culture is I want to say lateral, not just a vertical inheritance. It's an absolutely—Yeah, more lateral—I don't know if it was Chamberlain pointed out years ago to me that more languages are being spoken in New York right now than in any other place in the world.

MEH: Oh, I believe that. They said, some reporter on 9/11 said on the street, people watching it, every language in the world was being spoken around him.

RC: I hear. Right.

MEH: A babble of every—That was so impressive to him.

RC: So I guess the irritation I feel as an artist, as a writer most particularly, is that the—I suppose you don't worry about respect, I mean if one's writing is—But the curious displacement of the writer, particularly poets, have endlessly to deal with in order to get to any kind of means by which their work will be accessible. That's why I like the Web, I think. It's very very good.

MEH: How do you remember the landscape at Black Mountain?

RC: Oh, it was haunting. Because, again, I mean, frankly [LAUGHS] the thing of your cover, this is MIT Press again, I know, they really like Black Mountain. They've got a wonderful, that wonderful spread of the—beginning with the old Dining Hall that shows you the whole range of the mountains. Wow. You know. It's very very beautiful. It's certainly one of the most beautiful places ever. Ever. And the—you

know, the seasons there, the sense of—Yeah, it was really haunting. Wonderful. The night. I remember the palpable night. The sounds and these—you know, the sensual quality of the air, the senses of being dense, you know. Yeah, it felt wonderful. Yeah. I thought it was an ode back to "A Form of Women." That's—[LAUGHS] See it as trees and shapes. More fearful, et cetera, et cetera. [LAUGHS] So Mary, how do you think? I think we're—

MEH: You think we're about done?

RC: Yeah, I can't—

MEH: One other question, I was thinking—Do you have any particular memories of Ma Peek's?

RC: Yeah—

MEH: A lot.

RC: Well, I remember it being kind of a classic down-home hangout, with Ma Peek, I remember, and her daughters, two or so daughters. And it was a rough and ready place. They were—they actually were good to us in the sense that they didn't throw us around or throw us out. They were just—They weren't indifferent. They acknowledged and made room for us. I don't think it was just the economics, because we brought very little money to the place. But they took to us. I guess they felt themselves in some ways outlawed, and they recog-—They were sympathetic to our—They were good allies. And they certainly treated me with remarkable patience and good nature, and they did all my friends, as far as I remember. Because they—you remember that Black Mountain itself was not consciously priggish, but it was not at all patient with the kind of people we

seemingly were. I mean, it had no place for these outsiders that now come in and seem to profess things and have habits that were so unreal, you just didn't do that. I don't think it was like—they used to call it "free love" blah-blah-blah. I don't think that was—No, there was no—that was not, we weren't sleeping in the streets or something. But they simply didn't recognize us and were therefore hostile. Whereas the Peks recognized us and were therefore interested. You know. I mean they didn't recognize us either, but they were, you know, we were like not truck drivers, but at least we were—They were much more interested. They were just more—If you've got money enough to buy beer, sit down and drink it. That's fine.

MEH: Two other questions. Particulars. One, physically how did you travel back and forth. Did you have a car?

RC: I had an old truck, and that was my primary—That's how I did it. I can't recall how I did it the second time. That's how I did it the first time. I'm trying to think—I think I may even have left the truck there, but I can't—There it goes blurred. What did I do with the truck? I know I left my cat there. I think I did leave—Yeah, because I remember a friend said she used to come down and when you came back she was suddenly right back. So I think that's what I did. I left my truck there and they kept it running.

MEH: Second question, again particulars. Where did you live?

RC: I lived in the, in the Studies Building, that long building. I lived at the very end, in the lower of the—One—As the building extends, one room more on the bottom

level, and it was cut back on the top, and I lived in that very end extension, with one of the substantial panes of glass broken.

MEH: I know exactly the space.

RC: You know which it is. Canvas. In my time, the window was broken, as I say. Not easy. Okay.

[END OF RECORDING ON SIDE 2, TAPE 1]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]