

Interviewee: ALBERT WILLIAM LEVI
Interviewer: MARY EMMA HARRIS
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MEH: Generally, I limit my participation in interviews. Levi was at the center of a number of controversies at Black Mountain College. At times I have defended the opposing party[ies] to better understand his position. As is often the case, with time he had forgotten many of the details.

[BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1]

AWL: The—This is only what I've heard from hearsay. I don't know it of course directly, because I wasn't there, but in the days that Olson and Creeley and their friends—I don't think you could call that Black Mountain College anymore. It was an artists' community, and so you have to—If you're talking about Black Mountain as an idea, that's a much more limited kind of thing. You have to be, I think, very careful in distinguishing—

MEH: How would you define Black Mountain as an idea?

AWL: Well, I think there were two different things that were at the foundation of it. One of it—good [SOUND DROPS AS LEVI WALKS AWAY FROM MICROPHONE] Duberman's book, and I think it's a very misleading book in some respects because the way in which he participated in it actively, that is to say as if he were there, represents some of his own biases which have not a great deal to do with what was actually there. And this is one of the reasons why unless you have a particular emphasis, you are bound to lose the many-sidedness—do you understand?—of the college, and that may mean that the very thing that you're

interested in is itself only one aspect of what—to understand the total picture of what the college was. So let me put it this way, and this is one of the things that caused troubles over and over again within the college, was this kind of ideological quarrel about what the college was all about. I would say the first important idea was that it was an educational community. Now if you take those two terms, "educational" and "community," you already see the seeds of enormous disagreement. Because students and faculty alike, some of them came to it because it was a college and some of them came to it because it was a community. And, particularly, I would say in terms of the students—

MEH: Don't you think some came for both reasons though?

AWL: Sure. I think—Put it this way, they wanted a college in which human relations between faculty and students were close, but that doesn't imply community in the other sense in which you have something like a neighborhood, that is a familial situation. You know, everyone took their meals in the Dining Hall and so forth and so on. What I remember is that differences were always very strongly (?) because of these two aspects, and perhaps I'm most aware of that because those are what schisms came from and so on. For example, the pure community, without the educational, that was, for example, what drew John Wallen to the college. He was only there a relatively short time, and his importance in Duberman's book I think represents Duberman's own feeling that colleges should be primarily communities rather than what the actual situation was. It was kind of blown up out of all proportion to what Wallen really did at the college, in my opinion. But, for example, he resigned once because he said, "What we have

here is too much college and not enough community." And within the same week in which he resigned, our chemist resigned—that's Hansgirg. He was a world-famous authority on magnesium. He's dead, and I think his wife is dead. But a brilliant chemist. He resigned because he said, "This place is becoming too much a community and there's not enough sound education taking place." Well, I remember this because it happened, as I say, the two of them for opposite reasons, in the same week. And you found that—I would say also in the same way, in '46, '47, '48—those are the years that I remember best—there was a kind of split in the student body in the same way. There were kids who came down because they were interested in community. They were not too much interested in the arts. They were much more interested in the crafts, in building, woodworking, you understand, this kind of thing. Insofar as they were interested in music, it would not be classical music but folk music. And that represented one pole. On the other hand there were a number of students who came from the large cities of the north, who were highly sophisticated, interested in the avant-garde, in painting, in music and so on. They were interested too in something that didn't have the impersonality of the large city, but they weren't very much interested in the Work Program and the concept of community which the others had. So I would say both from the faculty and the student point of view, the question "Is Black Mountain primarily a college or is it primarily a community?" was almost from the beginning a bone of contention. At least it was during my years there. All right, that's one important idea. It's a college community, and you can see what can happen because of it. The other

fundamental idea, in my opinion, was—and this is how it differed from the traditional college—was that it was a tripartite program, and the idea was that approximately equal emphasis was put on academic work, work in the arts, and manual labor. And, for example, when I went down there, it was my idea that it was a college community and that these three things were to be pursued as it were simultaneously. But that also caused difficulties because despite the fact that that was the idea, Albers didn't really like that idea. He wanted really to have a kind of art school in which there were a few sympathetic academic subjects that went with it. And that caused all kinds of problems because if someone left the college—say, a man in history left—, then the question is "In what area will he be replaced?" and Albers almost always wanted to have someone from one of the arts come, and those who were interested in the balance said "No, we ought to get another man in history to replace him." So, the respective emphasis upon the arts and the academic subjects and the Work Program was also a kind of constant bone of contention. There were some who wanted to keep the academic subjects strong, and there were others who said, "Well that's less important, and really what we need to do is to develop the arts." And I would say that community—college—was the first idea, and I would say this relative equality of the academic, the arts, and work was the second great idea at Black Mountain.

MEH: How did you come to be at Black Mountain?

AWL: Well, it was accidental. M.C., who was my wife, and you probably have seen her, haven't you? Well, maybe she's told you about it. We were both teaching at the

University of Chicago, and she was the one who was fundamentally interested in Black Mountain. I don't think I'd even heard of it, but she had heard of it and was very interested. We both decided to leave the University of Chicago, but I had a very good job at the University of Minnesota—that's where I was going—but she was interested in Black Mountain and we were interested in getting married. This was the summer before we actually came down. And she came down to be interviewed, and the reason for that was that there was a vacancy—you probably know about Wunsch, the homosexual who was, before we came down, who had to leave suddenly, and it was his position. That is a position in English that was vacant. And that was the one that she heard about and applied for. She came down and was interviewed and liked very much and was offered the job. And then she came back and said "Well, would you be willing to go down?" And it was very hard for me to make up my mind [LAUGHS] because the—I was interested in the Minnesota job. But on the other hand, I had been teaching at the University of Chicago, and that was a hopelessly impersonal situation. We were lecturing to 350, 400, and discussion sections were fifty or sixty, and I didn't think that was close and intimate education. So, I was very open to the other. So, she wrote then to Black Mountain and said "Well, if you want me, you'll have to take this Levi man because we're going to get married." [LAUGHS] And so they wrote back and said "Well, what's his field?" Philosophy and social science. They said, "Well, we could use someone there. Send him down and we'll interview him." So, I went down and gave a paper, and on the basis of that they decided to hire us both. But it was largely through M.C.

MEH: Had you heard about the college before then?

AWL: No, never had. It was unknown to me. I may have. I'm not absolutely sure. I don't think I had over a period of time, but one thing—I think I had seen—either that summer or the year before, Eric Bentley published an article on Black Mountain. He had just left the year before, and that was I think in Partisan. I always used to read Partisan, and I think I saw that there. And I think that was the first I heard about Black Mountain. But it had not any great reputation and was not broadly known at all, I don't think.

MEH: So, it wasn't really an ideological trip for you? You weren't the person who was interested in experimental education?

AWL: Well, I was, as a kind of antidote to the kind of impersonality that—Did you ever read the little thing that I wrote for the—oh, I don't think you would have.

MEH: For?

AWL: Just a minute. Turn off your machine. [INTERRUPTION] It's not one which can be answered as you put it. It has to be answered "Yes," and then again "No." I was dissatisfied with the impersonality of the education at the University of Chicago and its purely intellectual character. But that was a kind of, that was negative. That was more a dissatisfaction. But I wasn't enormously drawn to the notion of education in the arts as such. That became much stronger after I got to Black Mountain. I saw what was going on and became devoted to that kind of thing there. But if you're talking about experimental, avant-garde education, that was much more M.C.'s point of view than mine, surely.

MEH: What did you find in terms of education in the arts at Black Mountain?

AWL: I found it was very, very good. The—Albers was a brilliant teacher of art education. No question about it. Had an enormous effect, and I had an enormous respect for him as an artist and as a teacher of art, and I still do. Our problems were political. We didn't get on, for personal and political reasons, but as a teacher of design, he seems to me to have been unparalleled.

MEH: What do you think was the basis of your political and personal disagreement?

AWL: [LAUGHS] Well, I'm sure it sounds very petty after all of these years. I [LAUGHS]—it started because the first year that M.C. and I were there, Ted Dreier and his family were away, and the Albers and the Dreiers lived together and there wasn't any other place for us to live, and we moved therefore into the Dreiers' apartment. And the—I think the first thing was Albers never talked to me about what should be done, and he went on stoking the furnaces, never talked about this to me at all. I just assumed well he knew how to do it [LAUGHS], and I afterwards found out he was very annoyed that he had to do the furnace and that I never asked him about doing it. It was a perfectly petty and trivial kind of thing. But I was told subsequently that that got everything off to a bad start. I thought our relations were perfectly good. I used to go into his studio which was right across and watch him work and so on. I think that was the beginning of the personal thing. But I think it was—I think there were two other things there. I think the—when I was elected Rector by the faculty, I think the news came to Albers as something of a shock, and I believe the reason for that was largely—well, I think there were two reasons for it. One of them was that the person who was there the year before was Eric Bentley, and Eric Bentley was very leftist, and I think

that Albers identified the two of us. Maybe we were both interested in matters of the intellect. And Albers was not particularly. He had some, I think, contempt for mind as such. Anyway, I think he probably identified us and thought that we were both power-mad. And, in fact, it was very unusual for someone who was there for the first year as someone to be elected as Rector. And so there was always the feeling that “they were going to take the college away from us.” It was a very strong thing with both Albers and Dreier, and I think it was very, very unfortunate. But I think those two things. I think Albers—partly because of the experience that he'd had in the last days of the Bauhaus—the days before it closed in Weimar, Germany, there were all kinds of political intrigues that went on inside the Bauhaus. And I think it made Albers very, very unsophisticated politically and very concerned whenever politics raised its head. Now “politics” from his point of view and from some others was a dirty word at Black Mountain, but Black Mountain couldn't be anything else but political. By which I mean it was a democratic place. Now, if you have a religious community—Quakers—then you can go by consensus because you—Religion, if you like, is the philosophy of the like-minded. But among the unlike-minded, there is no way but persuasion, democratic vote, and so on. So it was by the very nature of the place, a community of highly unlike-minded people. To have differences of opinion, to pick votes on it and so on. That's the way the community governed itself. And I don't think Albers had had any experience with that, and I don't think he had any appreciation of what democracy means. I think that was probably the price he had to pay for his German background. Where democracy prevailed in Germany,

i.e., in Weimar, it was an anomic situation. It was a prelude to the end. But that was one of the problems at Black Mountain. There were a relatively large number of German refugees, and almost without exception they were frightened by the concept of democratic politics. I take that an accidental feature of their European background.

MEH: What do you think was the basis of your disagreement with Ted Dreier?

AWL: Same. Very largely. He and Albers were very good friends. They had been there a very, very long time, and I think the college had been very much under Ted Dreier's thumb. And I think he was shocked—He was the Rector before me, you understand, and he was not very efficient, and there was considerable dissatisfaction with him as Rector, and I guess he was not too happy about having a successor and would not feel I think very good about it. Ted had a very peculiar relation to the college which not very much has been said about this. Duberman, I don't know if he knew about it but he certainly didn't put it in and it was rather a—Ted was one of the last ones—When I came down, I think except for Albers, he was the last one of the original founders of the college. If I remember correctly, Black Mountain had been in existence about thirteen years before M.C. and I came. Twelve years maybe. I think it was founded in '33. We came down in the fall of '45, and Anni Albers and Albers and Ted were still among the—Well, no, Albers wasn't one of the originals. Ted was. And he had a naturally proprietary interest in the college. He'd been there so long. And he had done a great deal for it in the way of helping it to maintain itself financially. And he was the one who was the last representative, so to speak, of the financial

situation, and that put him in a particularly intimate relation with the college but also rather dangerous one. [MEH: The following discussion relates to loans made by members of the Dreier family and a member of the Morrow family during the war years. As Levi experienced when he tried to obtain a loan for the college, banks would not lend to the college. The loans were in the form of demand notes. Although I represent the financial situation of the Dreier family, I cannot speak authoritatively. They returned the interest to the college as a gift.] Let me tell you—when the college moved from, you know, where it was before? When it moved to this valley, it had to buy the property, and it bought the property from the Grove Estate, which was in Asheville. Now the arrangements—I've forgotten a great deal about all of the details—but the arrangement with the Grove Estate was a perfectly normal economic arrangement, namely, it was a mortgage, the payments of which were amortized. And that means each year when the college made its payment, part of the payment was interest and part was paying off the principal, so that in a certain specified number of years the debt to the Grove Estate would be wiped out, the college would be free. I think it's legally in the hands of the faculty as owners. Now that was the first mortgage. But for some reason that I don't really know there was a second mortgage on the college to the amount of ten thousand dollars. And that mortgage, the money was borrowed from Ted Dreier and his relatives, and instead of being written as any mortgage should be—namely, it would be paid off, the interest, and amortized—this second mortgage was in the form of demand notes, which meant that any time Ted's relatives asked for the money, it had to be paid at once. Well, ten thousand

dollars in terms of Washington University or Yale is not very much money, but in terms of Black Mountain it was incredible. And consequently the ten thousand dollars owed to Ted's relatives in the form of demand notes constituted a kind of permanent threat to the college. If Ted didn't like the way something was going, he would say "Well, I don't think my relatives would like this very much." Now, that's not a very strong threat on the face of it, but if they're not liking it—do you understand?—is backed up and the threat included "Well, they might foreclose," then the college was in a perpetual state at any point that its policies are not along the lines that Ted's desires were. Now, after I became rector, we disagreed in matters of policy—The treasurer of the college, Theodore Rondthaler—he's dead, of course. I don't know if you've had a chance to talk to his wife or not, Alice? She's very old, and I don't even know if she's still living. But she comes from your part of the country, lives on Ocracoke. And they were fine people. But the same kind of threats that were in a sense made to me were made to Drei-, to Rondthaler also, and he said "Well, the college is going to continue to be threatened as long as this happens." And so we refinanced. We paid off the demand notes, and the second mortgage. Then, we borrowed another ten thousand dollars from Stephen Forbes, a student, had been a student of the college. It was by accident that that happened. I'll tell you the story. This has not very much to do with the arts that you're interested in, but Rondy and I went up to New York to try to borrow ten thousand dollars to refinance that second mortgage, and we couldn't raise it. There was a student named Lorna Blaine. Have you come across her at all? A very nice girl. Her father was either first or

second Vice President of the Bank of Manhattan, which was a big bank. And Rony and I went in to see him, and he said—We told him what we needed, and he said, "Well that isn't very much money." He said "Well, you have a Board of Trustees?" We said "No, we don't have any Board of Trustees." He said "Well, who is the head of the college?" And I said "Well, I'm the nominal head. I'm the rector." And he said "Well, can we depend on you to deal with in the near future?" And I said "Well, no, I'm afraid you can't because the rectorship is an elective office, and the election is held every year. I can be—Someone else can be—" And he frowned. A very nice man. And he said "I'm afraid I couldn't possibly loan you ten thousand dollars. You're just too democratic." The college. So, this was I think one of the problems.

MEH: Can you cite to me other people who ever heard Ted Dreier use this mortgage as a threat?

AWL: I don't have any idea, because it was largely Rondthaler and myself. We were respectively the rector and the secretary-treasurer of the college, and we would talk about policy with Ted. I don't think he would ever say anything like this—do you understand—in public.

MEH: I have a real conflict here in that I have read a great deal of correspondence having to do with that mortgage when it was made—it was made in the spring of 1942.

AWL: I know nothing about that.

MEH: At that point the problem with the college was that so many students were drafted that year, and they had just built the Studies Building, and they were too

small to get money from any of the wartime programs. And the idea was—I mean, there was absolutely no operating money. They were really down to bones—and the idea was that they should close at that point and reopen after the War, which everyone there realized at the time that if they closed they would never reopen.

AWL: Sure.

MEH: And so the only one who had access to money was Ted Dreier, which is a misnomer, especially amongst your friends, I feel, like constantly talked about how wealthy Ted Dreier was—which isn't true.

AWL: Oh, I don't know very much about that.

MEH: But anyway, the mortgage was made, and in the form of demand notes, which obviously was a bad thing. It was not—it was bad for Ted's part of this to, to happen, for him to be in this position of having—

AWL: Why wasn't it done in an ordinary mortgage way?

MEH: I think at that point there were several reasons. That there was an idea that Ted's family was terribly rich, which from all I can tell from the records I've seen, there was considerable property in the family—meaning land, at that point—but that they, financially they didn't have that much money they could put their hands on any time after the Depression. I mean Ted has always worked for a living, all of his life.

AWL: No, no, my question—

MEH: Okay, let me finish. Okay, and the idea was that if they were in some financial—I've read all of his aunts' correspondence to him at the time, and his

correspondence to them—was that if they were in a position where they had to have the money immediately that, that the college, you know, that if they were in a position where they just had to have the money, then they should be able to demand it, okay. That was the idea. And there also is correspondence dating from 1942 on in which Ted was asking that the college, you know, do whatever was necessary to pay the money back because he did not like being in the position of having his family—the college indebted to his family. Which seems to be in direct conflict with what you're telling me.

AWL: Well, there's even more that would be in conflict, and that is that when Ted heard that the college had been refinanced, he was furious. Now, why should he have been, if he wanted his family to be—

MEH: Had the whole faculty been aware of this financial working? Or was it done and then they were told?

AWL: I am not—I think the Board of Fellows—

MEH: (UNINTELL)

AWL: I think they might—I don't—(UNINTELL: I must say (?)) I don't remember exactly. I think the Board of Fellows authorized Rony and I to do that. It was not the kind of thing the community in general would have been concerned with because many of them didn't know very much about finances—Johanna Jalowetz—

MEH: The community in general, all of your followers, have told me about this. I mean, you had a very strong clique of disciples, and they—

AWL: I don't know anything about that. Who do you mean? (OVERTALK)

MEH: Oh, the Wallen group in Oregon. Oh, who did I talk to about it? Charlie Bloomstein, who happens to live two doors down.

AWL: Where is he now?

MEH: He lives on the same street I do. Two doors down.

AWL: Would you tell him? I have lost track of—Are you going back?

MEH: Sure.

AWL: Would you tell him to drop me—Give him my address. I—What's he doing now?

MEH: Well, I'll tell you later, okay, because I'm taping now. But we'll come back to Charlie Bloomstein.

AWL: Okay, yes.

MEH: But see it's a very difficult thing for me, because there's really conflicting information, and I agree that the mortgage should not have been taken in the form of demand notes, that Ted Dreier should possibly have let the college close instead of putting himself in that position—

AWL: I know nothing about what happened before to—But it was a—

MEH: See, I'm not sure the extent to which—I'm not sure whether Ted was using this as a threat or whether it was being used as a political issue against him.

AWL: Well, I mean, you have a right to have some doubt about that, but we weren't—There was no way of using it against him. The main thing to do was—

MEH: But obviously it was. Everyone tells me about how Ted Dreier did this in order to keep some control over the college.

AWL: Well, I don't know how they—Perhaps it was known more widely than—I don't remember that—There was always a feeling, I think even when we first came

down—I didn't know anything about the demand notes then—that somehow Ted was always keeping his finger on things so that it was unwise to oppose him.

From the very first, when I came down to the college I—

MEH: I think he did have a proprietary feeling about the college at that point. I mean, having, you know, been there for (OVERTALK)

AWL: Yes, maybe it came from that. But where the information seeped out—

MEH: See everybody seems to tell me you're the source of information.

AWL: Well, I can't say. I don't—That's something I, you know, I couldn't, I couldn't tell.

MEH: I just don't—You know, apparently it was a big issue, and I don't know—Maybe, maybe the truth is more ambivalent. You know. Maybe there was probably a lot of truth both ways. I'm not sure.

AWL: Well, the question about the direction in which the college should go is the important thing. I think that's a matter of—

MEH: Where would you have—What would your position have been there?

AWL: Well, it was—it would have been to maintain the status quo, as I understood that it was, namely, to maintain these three parts of the college strong. And so I would have been unhappy at any attempt to turn it into a school merely for the arts.

MEH: What about—Did you have any disagreement with Albers' teaching of the arts? I seem to—There was some division there between people who were more interested in what we've come to call the fine arts and those who were interested more in crafts and things.

AWL: No. No. I—On that—I don't know that Albers was ever opposed to the crafts.

MEH: No. Not opposed to the crafts. That's for sure. But the artsy-craftsy sort of thing, he probably would have been.

AWL: Oh, well, I don't know anything about—I don't think I ever had any—As I say, I never had anything but enormous admiration for the way in which he taught art and design and so on. I thought he was very, very good. I had no quarrel at all about those things that were done at the college. I thought it was all to the good.

MEH: But back to Ted Dreier, did you feel that beyond the business of his mortgage, that you had ideological differences with him?

AWL: I don't think so. I don't think so. I think that if I hadn't been—felt as in some sense a threat to having things pretty much in their hands, I don't think any troubles ever would have arisen. He was a very nice man. I liked him very much when I first went down. He was somewhat innocuous. Not a very good teacher, but a good human being, I thought. I—One thing is that as you look back on it, the—Many of the troubles that occurred at Black Mountain were to some extent situational. They wouldn't have happened if it had been at Washington University. I was just looking up something that I wrote at the end of—I have a manuscript of about a hundred pages, kind of a sociological study of Black Mountain that I wrote soon after I left. And I'm not sure whether I wrote it in the spring of '51, just after I—And it's rather impersonally written. And I have some—Here is the table of contents, which will give you some notion of what—What I tried to do was, as impersonally as I could, to talk about the kind of conflicts that arose, just as you would in any social situation, to see what was responsible for them and so on. And one of the things is that [EXTERNAL INTERRUPTION]—The reason I show

this to you is that I just was looking myself at it before—I hadn't looked at this for a long time. Wanted to see if I could find something that was helpful for you. But one of the difficulties was that the Black Mountain community was totally isolated, really, and that meant there was in a sense no place else to go. And the relations were so close. If you have a disagreement with someone at an ordinary university, well, it's three weeks till you see them again. Something has healed by that time. And so it's my feeling that there is a reverse side that you pay for this closeness, and that is precisely that there is no anonymity. There is no moment to, as you do in a theatre performance, an intermission stepping out into the street for a breath of air. There was none of this there. And if you had a disagreement with someone, you saw the same person, you passed them five times a day on the road between the Dining Hall and the Studies Building, and there was really no chance for wounds to heal, very much. And I think that the assiduousness, that the degree of—it was unnatural. And I think it was not only between Ted Dreier, but wherever there were enmities, they grew into enormous proportion between students, or with student and fa—. I can't begin to tell you the kind of things that happened. I think that was one of the prices that you paid for unmitigated community. It was just too close. There were no real areas of privacy into which one could retreat. And I think they gave to the quarrels in the community an absolutely unnaturally exaggerated character. So I look back upon it—Now it's now twenty-five years afterwards. I remember, of course, the things that happened, but I don't think they ever should have happened. I think they would have been avoidable, and I think that was a function of the community.

MEH: I guess—

AWL: So, I don't really feel that Ted Dreier and I disagreed on great matters, but one of the things is that—There's something I think will interest you. Let me see if I can find this for you. [RUMMAGING SOUNDS] [BREAK IN RECORDING] This is written in the present tense. This was written in '51. It says "Black Mountain is a community of strong-minded, often fanatical, individuals. Many have come because frustrated in their social hopes and plans for reform elsewhere, the openness of the Black Mountain situation suggests that here their dreams may be given concrete substance. But these are frequently doomed to bitter disappointment, not because of rigid social stratification or lack of social fluidity or a hardened tradition but simply because they find themselves in the presence of other strong-minded fanatical individuals like themselves who, however unfortunately, frequently have different dreams and social hopes. Reformers are frustrated at Black Mountain not by social rigidity but by the very recalcitrance of the human materials with which they coexist. This leads to a tremendous personalization of politics and to the devil theory of community catastrophe. Individuals begin to mutter 'We could have peace and progress here if it were not for him,' or 'If it were not for those two, this failure would not have occurred.' Now if you combine this devil theory of community misfortune with a system of tenure which offers little security in the sense that reappointment is practically an annual matter and depends entirely upon the vote of one's colleagues, you have prepared the ground for the prevalence of the psychology of the purge. If one is bound by circumstances to live with those of unlike mind, there is only politics

left—that is, persuasion, compromise or, at the worst, periodic decision in which the stronger wins and the weaker must acquiesce."

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

AWL: If the college has the money to pay it, then people will be reimbursed, and that probably—I don't really know the rationale. But that wasn't, as I remember, my proposal. It probably came from Rondthaler or whoever was Treasurer at the time, but it would make it seem less unpalatable, do you understand? To simple change in the middle of the year, or whatever. This was not done at the beginning of the year, if I remember correctly. Was it?

MEH: What?

AWL: The salary scale was fixed, and then it became clear that we couldn't afford to pay the salaries. So it was said, "Well, let's pay what we can. We've already fixed the salary. People have claimed what has already been said." But no one I think felt too badly about not getting it, and no one, so far as I know, ever expected to get the money back. [MEH: Levi refers to the contingent salaries by which faculty were paid one-half salary and the remaining half was listed as a debt.]

MEH: But couldn't you see in the long run how impractical this was? That the whole history of the college was? That it has not enough money every year to meet its immediate needs, and that this would just mount—as it did, I mean in the office it was mounted as a debt against the college. Each year. Every year in the audits—

AWL: Oh I don't know. When did that start?

MEH: I think it was in the spring of '50. It had to be if you received any money from it, because you left in the winter of '51.

AWL: Oh I got a very tiny—sixty dollars.

MEH: Right, but you were only there like one semester under that thing.

AWL: It may have been—Very little. But if they went on doing it, that's nothing that I know anything at all about. As I remember, it was only done for one year. I know nothing about what happened—

MEH: It was done for six years.

AWL: From when to when?

MEH: Until the college closed.

AWL: Oh, but that would be—I have no responsibility for that, nor do I know anything about it. So far as I know, it was only done one year, and no one ever took it very seriously. It was a—

MEH: See I guess what I was saying, see I disagree with the contingent salary in the same sense that I disagree with the mortgage. I feel like it was financially a very unwise thing to do.

AWL: But you're talking about something that has—I will say honestly—almost nothing to do with my time at the college. This may have happened the last year that—Rondy, I guess, was gone by that time. Someone else was the treasurer who put it forward. I'm not sure. But it was put, I believe, as a very, as a crisis measure and no one would have—I mean, we were getting so little anyway that it didn't amount—And that precedent may have been badly used from then on, and that's something I don't know anything about since I wasn't there. But one thing that happened that was—I thought I would write this up once, and unfortunately I never did at the time but I wanted to and now most of the details have escaped.

But the salary scale at the college became progressively more non-idealistic over the five years that M.C. and I, the five years that I was there. And I regretted that very much. It was very largely due to Albers that that happened.

MEH: How was that?

AWL: Well, I don't know if I can tell you the details exactly, and maybe you wouldn't agree that the policy was bad. Anyway, when M.C. and I came down, you were given your board and room, or keep, plus twenty-five dollars a month per person in your family. Now that meant that when we first went down, M.C. and I got seventy-five dollars—twenty-five for her, twenty-five for me, twenty-five for Estelle. The Albers got fifty dollars. The Corkrans, who were this terribly bone of contention [LAUGHS] from the Albers point of view—he had three children and he was the only teacher, so he got 125 dollars. Now Albers thought this was scandalous. Both he and his wife were teaching and only got fifty dollars a month, and here—and they had no children. And here were these people at the college who had children who were getting money, and it was not a fair kind of thing. So it was due to his proposal that the first undemocratic—you understand I'm talking about absolute democracy—that the first change came which made a distinction between teachers and members of their family.

MEH: You consider that undemocratic?

AWL: In the way in which we originally were, do you understand?

MEH: Originally it was very different.

AWL: Oh, I don't know anything about that, but this was a kind of—This of course was more a community kind of thing. It—Put it this way. It was much more closely

geared—"Undemocratic"? That's a bad word to use, because it's loaded. But let me put it this way: it is, I suppose, more according to the notion "To each according to his need," and not "To each according to his ability or his contribution." In that sense, it—I shouldn't say "more democratic." I should have said "more idealistic," because what—Of course, people with more children need more. It's perfectly obvious. But Albers objected on the grounds that we are contributing so much, we really deserve more. It's not the people with the children. It's the people who teach and who are capable and competent. You should be compensated more in terms of your ability rather than in terms of your need. Now that's a different principle. Maybe you don't want to call it "less democratic," but I would say that's—The principle "conditional compensation" is, it's the ordinary principle in capitalist societies. Whereas the other comes closer to the ideal of a real non-economic community where you share everything. You give what you can, et cetera, et cetera. So, it was a less idealistic point of view. That happened the first year. I had forgotten. There was a small differential. And I think both M.C. and I, though we profited from it, because we were also two teachers, we felt badly about it. And then the next year, the distinction came in the children. "Well why should a babe-in-arms"—there were the—I may be wrong, I don't remember exactly, but I think it came about because the Lowinskys had a new baby. And why should Simon be getting the same thing as a child of fifteen? He didn't need as much. And so then the second distinction was among children. Those of a certain age—I think there were three age categories, in

which the babies got fifteen dollars—do you understand what I—The middle-aged ones, and if you had teenagers, then that was still more.

MEH: But couldn't this also be justified "Each according to his need"? Couldn't they have said that the needs of an adult are perhaps more expensive than the needs of a child? I don't need this because I'm more important but because I'm an adult. I have to—I have professional needs, and (OVERTALK)

AWL: Oh I think so. I think so. Sure.

MEH: This could be justified as being equally as idealistic as each getting twenty-five dollars apiece.

AWL: Only—The thing that happened along with it was that the distinction between teacher and dependent grew each year, and so teachers began to get more and more and dependents less and less. So that, you understand, was a kind of constant thing. Now there's no question about the fact that there was some hardship. I remember in the case of someone like Molly Gregory, the woodworking woman, very fine woman, excellent craftswoman—have you seen her? What has happened to her?

MEH: She has a wood shop in Massachusetts [MEH: Vermont].

AWL: Does she? Well, she was very—a very shrewd and very competent woman, but she was alone there and, of course, twenty-five dollars a month, you know, was—

MEH: It seems that the major salary raise was made in the fall of 1949, after the Alberses left. There was a tremendous jump in salary that year. [MEH: This statement is based on memory and should be confirmed.]

AWL: We were, M.C. and I, I think, were not at the college.

MEH: You were there.

AWL: Are you sure? You're sure? The fall of '49?

MEH: I would have to check, to be honest, whether—(OVERTALK)

AWL: Oh, I think you're right. We were gone in '48-'49.

MEH: You were gone in '48-'49.

AWL: That's right. Yeah.

MEH: One thing I wanted to ask you. The summer of '49, which was the second summer that Buckminster Fuller was there, were you all back that summer or did you stay gone through the summer? That was the summer that Walley and Woelffer from the Institute of Design were there, and Vashi the dancer.

AWL: I think we were there.

MEH: But you can't remember for sure.

AWL: I think—I don't really remember when we got back from Europe. I remember we had a meeting with the man who was kind of supervising the college, what was his name?

MEH: Pittinger.

AWL: Pittinger. And we were at his place. I've forgotten where it was. His home. Someplace in Pennsylvania?

MEH: I think in that area, right. Near Swarthmore. He had been at Swarthmore.

AWL: I think that's right. And talked to him. And my recollection is that that was during the summer. I think the first part. I must confess—Can you say any more about that summer, who else was there?

MEH: I'm trying to think. Buckminster Fuller was there a second time. He brought Vashi and an Institute of Design group that year. John Walley, Emerson Woelffer. In music there weren't that many outside people.

AWL: Who was there in art, in painting?

MEH: In painting, Walley and Woelffer. Woelffer in painting and Walley in sculpture.

AWL: [SIGHS] Well, I don't have a vivid recollection. M.C. would certainly be able to tell you (INAUDIBLE).

MEH: That's true. The other summer I wondered about was—I have a problem with my records—is the summer of '46. Your first year there was '45-'46.

AWL: We were away that summer.

MEH: You were gone that summer, weren't you? I thought so. Okay, going back a bit, what—Do you remember having a conflict—I've got two other conflicts to ask you about and then we'll get to some other things.

AWL: [LAUGHS] I'll do my best to remember.

MEH: I'm not just interested in conflicts. In the summer of '47, you were Rector that summer, and there was a guy, Charles Bell, there. He was a writer. Do you remember a conflict with him, and what the subject was?

AWL: I do remember. It wasn't a personal—I want to say some things that you must know already from the—The job of the Rector at Black Mountain was an extraordinary thing. Had I known, you understand, what was involved—One was constantly having privately to take care of matters that were dreadfully unappetizing. That's the only way one can put it, because one could not bring them to public attention. And that is another thing that over the years I'm afraid I

accumulated a great deal of ill will. Do you understand? I think it is not simply personal. It's due to the nature of the situation. That's why you have to be very careful (OVERTALK) about talking—Hm?

MEH: Would you say that Ted Dreier was in the same position?

AWL: I'm sure he must have been. I am sure he must have been. Mind you, he was Rector before me. But if any kind of analogy holds—I don't see why it shouldn't?—I would think Ted's—Mind you, he was only Rector for a very short time because if I remember correctly, it was toward the end of our first year that he resigned. Is that right?

MEH: I'm not sure. I think it was toward the end of the second year—?

AWL: Of the second year. Well, he wasn't there then.

MEH: He was gone '45-'46, and then I think he was back for the fall of '46, and then resigned [OVERTALK] in the spring of '47.

AWL: That's all I mean. He was not Rector—

MEH: He was Rector in absentia.

AWL: That's right. But I mean I wouldn't have known anything about it. So the only time I experienced his rectorship was, as you say, that part of the first—part of the second year. Good. And I have no reason to believe otherwise. It was a thankless task in many ways. I'll give you one example. It's after twenty-five years. It's not indiscreet, but it's a kind of—I read Duberman's book, and there were some things that I have a very hard time understanding because, for example, Ilya Bolotowsky says some rather unkind things about me in the book, and we always got along together very well. He was a—he was sharp in his

perception, but we were always very, very friendly. Nothing ever came out until the last year that he was there. He came down at the end of the summer with his wife, or so we thought, and no one would have raised any questions about it. Maybe you know something about this. And four weeks after college opened, the boy that I thought was Ilya's prize pupil—and here is where these enmities come in—but in fact hated—

MEH: Who would that have been? Can you tell me?

AWL: Well, I don't think I want to tell you that. It's not necessary to the story. The story is sufficient. This boy came to me, and he said, "I happen to know that Bolotowsky is not married to the woman that he came down to [SIC], and unless you do something about it, I will notify the Asheville papers." You have to know something about the relationship of Black Mountain, a kind of splinter in the finger of the South and the kind of terrible reputation that—Any kind of excuse, we were all very fearful of the surroundings. So this is obviously nothing which you can bring up to a faculty meeting. This is obviously nothing that you can bring up to a Board of Fellows. It's too personal. Do you understand? I mean, now people live together, no one thinks about it. But that was not so twenty or twenty-five years ago, particularly in the South. So I called Ilya in. You have no idea how distasteful this was to me, because this is personal. And I must tell you one other thing about it—I have never taken an administrative position since I left Black Mountain, and one thing that I learned from it was there are times in which there is an absolute conflict between what you believe personally and what you have to do as representative of an institution. I think that's a hopeless position

[LAUGHS] to be in. I called Ilya in and I said "X has told me that you are not married to the woman that you brought down. Is that true?" And he turned red as a beet. Very defensive. Said "Yes, that is true. We didn't really have time to get married and so forth and so on. Who told you?" I don't think I said. I said "Well I have been informed, and Ilya, I don't think it's possible to continue that way for the college. It seems to me you either have to get married or leave." I mean, I didn't mean that I would force him, but it just—if he didn't want to get married, I thought he should leave, and if he wanted to stay I think he should get married. And he wanted to stay. And so I said "Well then Ilya, if you could go in some afternoon secretly into Asheville and get married, and I will go to the college lawyer"—who was not a complete friend of the college. He resigned once from the Board of Trustees—from the Advisory Board, but—Now what was his name? Do you remember?

MEH: Williams.

AWL: You know it all! I'm so glad. You remember things that I don't possibly. And I went in to see Williams, and he had some influence with the newspaper, and I think they were persuaded not to publish that as a Vital Statistic. Do you understand what I mean? I mean someone from the college would have seen it—if my recollection holds. So Ilya went in to get marr—Now I think he must have, do you understand, ever after—How would you feel if someone said "Look—"

MEH: But you see this sort of thing, it seems to me, should have made you more sympathetic to the role that Ted Dreier had been in. This whole business. I mean, I think it's very perceptive, this business of if you're just—Once you're in a

position of responsibility, you become involved in things that you would prefer to have nothing to do with and actually even you do things—I mean if you had not been in a position of responsibility you probably would not even have thought that much about his not being married.

AWL: Yes. Sure.

MEH: Then, okay, for example in the Bentley thing, the incident—

AWL: No, I know nothing—

MEH: Okay, but the incident, see, that people talked, Bentley talks very little about, but which really sparked the final conflict—even though there were lots of other things involved—was two girls were given permission by one of the faculty members to hitchhike to Chattanooga, where he was teaching, and to hitchhike back. You can imagine the problems of hitchhiking in the South.

AWL: Oh, I know something—We had that later too.

MEH: Right. I know. Okay. Okay, at that point they hitchhiked. They got there okay, but on the way back. I don't know if it was in Chattanooga, maybe it was, in some town. Hitchhiking in the black section of the town, they were arrested. They received jail sentences. Apparently, it was used really as a weapon against the college. It was said that one of the girl's tests showed she had VD. She didn't, but things were falsified.

AWL: Sure.

MEH: Okay, everybody saw it as a big political issue, but Ted Dreier got in his car, drove there, got them out of jail—I mean my feeling was they behaved so nastily,

maybe he should have just left them in jail, but he realized that for the college, that this was just exactly what a lot of people would like. This is a weapon.

AWL: Yes.

MEH: Okay. He brought them back and once he got them out of jail and back to the college, they turned on him, and Bentley and his whole crowd, you know. Well this was a political issue, you know. These people that arrested. They were just racist, you know. The girls were perfectly fine. Okay. See now this is what you said before. If you've been in a position of authority—Even though he wasn't Rector then—When Wunsch was Rector, essentially Ted was (OVERTALK)

AWL: Yes, I understand that. I understand that. So I—

MEH: So it seems that Ted by the time you got there had a long list of things that people, you know, this same pattern.

AWL: I am sure you are right about it. (OVERTALK)

MEH: So seeing that having been in that position that it would in a sense make you more understanding of his position—

AWL: Well, let me say two things. It wouldn't in the immediate situation, and it has now. These things, you know, take a—

MEH: I'm sympathetic to both of you being in that position.

AWL: I understand. And I—When you ask, "Wasn't Ted in that?" and my answer to you "I'm sure he was." But the whole past was nothing that I had very much to do with. I only saw him very, very shortly and if it had not been for his attitude of suspicion and so forth—

MEH: Which was definitely there.

AWL: Well, not only that, but, for example, someone told me, soon after I became Rector—Here's the kind of thing that happened in the community, and you see it poisons relations too. Someone said "Well, you know why it was that Ted Dreier permitted you to be elected Rector?" And I said "Why?" They said, "Because he was sure that you'd cut your own throat in three months." Well that may be true or it may be false, but in this small community where there's constant rumor mongering—I mean the flames. If any two people are not too friendly, students, other members—these flames are fanned. And that's another thing what I mean by saying there's no possibility of getting outside of that, you understand, where you can have second thoughts. And this was one of the reasons, for example, I must say in all honesty, when I also read Duberman's book, I was really astounded at the resentment of Josef and Anni Albers to this day. Do you understand? I—It's gone a long time ago, and I remember that we had our troubles, but I think I see what they came from, and I think I see how they could have been avoided. And I don't genuinely feel resentful to them as human beings.

MEH: But you hadn't noted, when Albers died.

AWL: What?

MEH: That you said that you didn't note when Albers died.

AWL: He was here. He got an honorary degree the year that I was abroad. But I don't, I'm not sure whether I was even in the country when he died. You know, I knew that he was—I know a little bit through a mutual friend who was once a student of his at Yale. He was Lucian Krukowski, who was up to this year dean of our

graduate school of fine arts. And he had told me that Albers—I think that was when I first knew that he passed away. But you know we spent half the year, mostly, out of the country, and I don't have any way of keeping up with—I would have no way, I have never kept up with most of the people—So you can perhaps tell me where some of them in fact can be found.

MEH: Going back. Two things. One, my question before. The summer of '47 and Charles Bell. (OVERTALK) What was the basis of that conflict?

AWL: Oh yes. All right. Good, I see now that I—Well, it's a little bit difficult to resurrect, but let me see what I can do with it. He was also on the whole an intellectually very sympathetic man. He was, he came down from Princeton and he was interested in something that I personally was very much interested in, namely a kind of integration of the arts. He was the one—For example, we agreed very much that an historical period is one in which there is one kind of pervasive spirit, whether you're talking about the Classical or the Medieval, or the Impressionist world, and you'll find Impressionism, for example, in the music of the period, in the literature of the period, in the painting. This was his specialty, and I found that very exciting. He gave several lectures down there. They were good, and so on. Bell, it turned out—we heard from students, you understand, it was not direct—was very contemptuous of Black Mountain. He had come from Princeton, which is a very, or it was in those days, a very elitist school. The student body at Black Mountain—you could never say that it came from the upper middle class in the same way that Princeton students did—and he felt that there was something socially inferior about Black Mountain students, and a part of that—the rumor

was—that he also was anti-Semitic. One evening, I hope I'm not being melodramatic. I think it was two or three o'clock in the morning, three students came down where M.C. and I were living, woke us up, and said, "Look what we have found!" and it was Charles Bell's personal diary. These kids had broken into his study, rifled his desk, taken his personal diary and brought it down to us, and they read a couple of passages, before they could be stopped, which were anti-Semitic. Well, that's another one of those quandaries. We said "You have no right to take (UNINTEL). You return it right away." And they said "Well, we'll"—I've forgotten exactly what it is—"Anyway, you've got to do something about the anti-Semitism." True, there were lots of Jewish students at Black Mountain. So there was nothing at all, you understand, of any personal nature because I'm not religious, so I'm Jewish and I don't think I had any—I might have felt more annoyed about his contempt for the place because I identified very much with it, and the social background of the students is certainly unimportant in education. Some of that snobbery of Bell's partly came through, it was felt, by the students. But I had a talk with him, and he, of course, was outraged by the students taking the diary, and only talked about that. I was outraged too, but I also told him not to express any anti-Semitic sentiments in the—But I don't remember any, do you understand, that you talk of personal conflict. I don't think there was any. This was the issue that came up. And the only thing that I remember is frustration, because I didn't know which I felt strongest about—the students, do you understand, rifling to get this kind of evidence, or the evidence after it was produced. And I did my best to express outrage on both sides—to the students,

and said "Any behavior like that once again, they would be expelled." I mean, I didn't have the power to do it, but I said it. And I think I must have said something to Bell like "You can't behave like that." He was only there for the summer, but that was—Anti-Semitism was, as you can well imagine, a very strong issue and the War had not been long over and so forth and so on. So if there was any issue, that was the issue. Didn't you know about this?

MEH: Only bits and pieces. Bell wrote some kind of memoir after he left the college.

AWL: What happened to him?

MEH: I think he's in Santa Fe now. He teaches possibly at Albuquerque. I'm not sure.

AWL: I have never ever heard of him. I've not seen anything he's published, and I don't know—He was a very bright man.

MEH: There were some other things I was going to—Oh, next section. What precipitated your resignation in the spring of 1948 it was—as Rector—and your leave-of-absence.

AWL: Well, I'm not sure that I remember the details because they are technical.

MEH: It seems for one thing there was the Board of Fellows election, where essentially there was an election but the same balance was kept, because M.C. and Anni Albers were elected to the Board of Fellows.

AWL: Who was elected?

MEH: M.C. was elected to the Board of Fellows and Anni Albers was elected, which essentially, you know, neither faction gained anything there in that—if you assume that wives always vote with their husbands, which I think was assumed at Black Mountain.

AWL: No there was—I mean, this was certainly a strong political issue. This was very political, I remember. The—Okay. The issue—I've forgotten who was elected, but I remember well who wasn't elected. Okay. The person who was a candidate and who was elected was Charlie Bloomstein, and they—If I remember correctly, the candidate who was nominated, as soon as he was nominated, had to leave the meeting. I'm not absolutely sure of it, but this is my recollection. You just asked me. And while he was gone, he was discussed openly by everybody. The vote was taken, and then he was informed that he was elected or that he was not. The person I know that I was very anxious to get in was Bloomstein. He—There was a very acrimonious discussion, and he was elected by one vote. I left the meeting to tell him that he had been elected, and while I was out of the meeting, Johanna Jalowetz changed her vote. While I was out of the meeting. And when I came back from getting him—telling him he had been elected—, I was informed that the vote was changed and he was not elected. And I was furious that that happened with me outside, and I thought if things were that way, then I resigned at once. That's what caused it. You didn't know this?

MEH: [NEGATIVE].

AWL: I was furious, and I—When I was told that Johanna—I raged at her. She was an innocent soul [LAUGHS] and it must have been, I don't know, Ted or Albers or someone there, persuaded her in my absence to change the vote. And I thought that was as underhanded a thing as—Once the vote had been taken.

MEH: In a case like that, I guess it's—I'm just wondering. Would it have been legal? I mean how long do you have to change your vote after a vote has been taken in a—I mean, you know, do you understand what I'm saying?

AWL: Well, what can you do? I mean you don't—That's the sense of the meeting. She changed her vote and the other—It was one—You understand?

MEH: Yeah, I understand what you're saying.

AWL: All of the people who voted, who were so to speak on my side, as opposed to the Albers-Dreier side, would have felt just the way I did about it. But there was nothing you can do. Someone changes their vote; they change their vote. But I felt—

MEH: So why did you take a leave-of-absence then instead of just resigning from the college, period?

AWL: Well I don't, I don't remember that there was any—I can't answer your question. It may have been personal. It may have been personal, because—M.C. was equally bitter at that time about the whole—I mean she felt that was very unjust, what had happened. Our personal difficulties had not reached a serious position, and so any personal feeling with respect to me, she was very loyal in all these things which happened. And the only thing I remember was that we went to Ocracoke for that summer, and she wrote a rather bitter letter to Albers and Dreier about that. She was very disillusioned by their behavior too, and my recollection was that we felt that it was—You see, Black Mountain is not a very pleasant place for people to remain in when things like that happen, and we thought that we would just be happier out of the community. So we took all of

our—Also, M.C. was pregnant, and we thought it would be best to leave. I was quicker—I mean, it caused some problems because we drove up to New York and on the—because of the drive she had a miscarriage. If we had stayed, who knows. It was a very sad time. But we had saved up enough money to spend a year in Europe and—That hadn't been our plan. I guess it was after the miscarriage that we thought there's no use living in New York, and we'll go abroad for the year, but it wouldn't have been a very pleasant environment to live in under the circumstances.

MEH: See the problem I have here is I can understand your disillusionment, you know, just wanting to get away. But it seems that one of the problems at Black Mountain was that the faculty was so small that, for example, two people leaving in closely related fields—she in literature and writing, you in philosophy—essentially at that point Max Dehn had already been granted a leave of absence for '48, for the fall of '48—

AWL: I don't remember any of that.

MEH: He had—Dave Corkran was already, was just not functioning very well at all at that point.

AWL: Yes.

MEH: So essentially that left the college without anyone in philosophy and literature which is, you know, very bad for the students. You know, anyone who is studying suddenly to be left with no faculty in their field—

AWL: Sure.

MEH: And this happened at other times, too.

AWL: Oh, that's the history of the college. No continuity (OVERTALK)

MEH: The thing that—So, I can understand your disillusionment but then, on the other hand, just leaving so suddenly and leaving your students really without anyone in their field I find very difficult to understand.

AWL: Well, I don't remember that there was anyone who we were really committed to work with. It's a different story. For example, now I have doctoral candidates I work with, and when they're going to take their degree qualifies my own plans for going abroad and so forth and so on. But these students, you have to understand, the average student at Black Mountain only remained between a year and eighteen months. The average. Some were there one semester. There were a few who were there four, five, six years, but very, very few. So there was no such thing as a continuity in the curriculum so that you were needed. This is one of the things that you know yourself. So, courses were always very ad hoc. On the whole what someone wanted. And this—We, I think we—I'll have to look and see just for fun who were the students there, but I don't think there were any students who, for example, had planned to graduate in philosophy, social science, or in literature. There were no possible commitments, and the whole curriculum was such an ad hoc character that the problem of loyalty to students, in that sense, didn't exist at Black Mountain—for anybody. So, you're reading into that situation something that really comes from a different kind of situation.

MEH: I'll have to double check my notes, but I seem to remember some students having said they left because there was no one to study with then—

AWL: Well, I mean it may perfectly well have been the case that there were some students who would have wanted to study with M.C. and myself and who didn't much care for, so to speak, the faction that won. But you can't blame whoever it was—Bentley and the rest—for leaving. Their students left with them. We made no attempt to have any students leave with us. That was—This was no insurrection. It was purely personal—our saying we won't go. I think our mood at the time was—well, we'd just had enough of the community. Incidentally, the Albers and Dreiers left during the year we were away. We had nothing to do with that. I don't know that I have ever found out exactly what, but there was—Was Albers then the Rector, when I left?

MEH: [INAUDIBLE]

AWL: Well, there was sufficient dissatisfaction so there were votes of No Confidence, without our doing anything about it, so when we came back we thought now that—I mean, we never would have come back to—let's put it that way. I think this is fair, that M.C and I left Black Mountain, although we had, for insurance reasons, not resigned, but only resigned the Rectorship, because we didn't have any prospects and no jobs or anything else. And I think we always thought, well, if worst came to worst, we'd go back. But we were even talking in Paris—we were in France for the yea—of looking for other things, and we were exploring a few others. I don't think we had any intention of going back. It was only when Albers and Dreier left, and there was new regime, so to speak, that we thought of coming back. We thought it might have changed its character. But we were wrong. It was even worse. [OVERTALK]

MEH: Okay. Now this is the last dispute, faction, that I have to ask you about. Then we'll get on to some other things. And that is what was the nature of the college when you did get back? How was it like or different to the college you had left?

AWL: I don't know if I ever thought about it in that way, and it's hard to begin thinking about it. The only thing that—Let me put it this way. Now, this may be hard for you to understand, but just looking over some, what I had written, it may seem very egoistic to you, but the year '47-'48, the year before we left, was probably the high mark of Black Mountain College. Nell Rice said it was the best year she had ever experienced there, and we had the largest student body we ever had. I think it was ninety-two. I think the year before it had been seventy. I think when M.C. and I came down to the college—I don't remember exactly—I think the fall we came down there were fifty-two, and it went up—

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

AWL: —did not come back to the college the next year. And then I'm sure when Albers left another group of students—a large one I feel sure—would not come back. And so when we came back to the college, I think there was only thirty-five. Do you understand? An enormous falling off. So the community was already shrunk, and it—already by that time there was an enormous diminution in quality. Eddie Lowinsky had left. Albers had left. So that in music and art there was no one. Joe Fiore, who was a very nice boy and a good painter and a good instructor—he was no teacher the way Albers was. So I think we just found things kind of almost beginning again.

MEH: That could have good, it would seem.

AWL: Well, something in its spirit was gone. I mean, you know, you can't have too many splits over and over again. The other thing was—and both M.C. and I felt this very definitely—was Pittinger, who had come from Swarthmore, and a certain number of the people who were there wanted to turn Black Mountain into a relatively conventional place. They wanted to get a permanent rector. When I came back there was no rector. I believe I was elected as Chairman of the Board of Fellows, but there was no rector during that period. I was the only one acting—Pittinger was really in some sense there had to be someone to hold meetings and so on, but I don't think I did very much during the time. He would come down and consult, and he wanted to have a permanent rector, a board of trustees, to make it much more into a permanent kind of thing. My recollection is that, possibly mistakenly, M.C. and I were appalled. We thought its whole avant-garde and experimental character would go, and it would just turn into an ordinary place, which was not what Black Mountain had ever been. And I think we, then that was the basis of further fights with Natasha Goldowski and some of the others. But the quality of the place was certainly completely, completely different. Now this is another thing where you must pardon my ideological difference. But this is the kind of thing that I don't think that Duberman has any understanding of whatsoever, and that is the quality of Black Mountain as a functioning—when it was good—college community in which everything is going. The Work Program is doing well, there is high quality academics, and there is wonderful work in art and in music and in the crafts. And that's what it was in '46-'47, '47-'48. I look back and those two years as really, despite their quarrels

and so on, as things going very well. Now, partly that may just be my own attempt to cope. The first year we were at Black Mountain, as you say, Albers was there, and Dreier wasn't. The second year Dreier was there but Albers wasn't. The third year where the trouble star—they were there together. It was too much for anyone who was, so to speak, in an opposing camp to deal with very much. Later, the spirit of the place had really collapsed and its sense of being a community. The excellence of what took place, was severely compromised. I'm sure it sounds bad, but the people who took the place of those who left—good as they were—were certainly not of the same quality. Hetherington in music was a very nice guy, but he was just not Eddie Lowinsky. Joe Fiore was a very nice personal friend of ours, and I like him very, very much, but just wasn't Albers and couldn't—And the same was true in many cases in the academic side also. It just was a different kind of place. Now what I was getting at was what you get from Duberman and what I think has to do with a very, very biased way in which he had taken the evidence, Black Mountain prior to his going was Albers. And Black Mountain subsequent to his going was Olson. And from this account, these two represent what Black Mountain was and what happened between Albers and Olson was just a transition. And this is a total misrepresentation of what Black Mountain was.

MEH: Okay. I'm very interested in the period in between, because I have some ideas about that. Tell me what you think about the period in between.

AWL: I don't, I don't—See, as I say, M.C. and I were both opposed to the conventionalizing of the college. We were both not reappointed, as you know,

and then a dreadful spring took place in which—again—politics, to get reappointed, and finally we were reappointed. But the college by this time was already in—It seems to me it was going so far downhill that I was ready to leave.

MEH: I would like to tell you something I think about that period and then you disagree me if you like or criticize or agree or whatever.

AWL: Okay.

MEH: It seems to me that the college was always dependent on a leader who really could articulate a vision for the college—a vision in terms of a certain form of excitement. I think that John Rice did this in the early years, and he was probably the one leader of the college who actually could bring some sense of community to the college. Okay, after he left I think Albers really did this, just in terms of the excellence of his teaching and the—

AWL: I don't think you're right.

MEH: Okay, let me finish. I think there was a period during the War when Albers was much stronger then because the faculty was so small during the War. Okay, in the postwar period, I see things as opening up a lot. Bentley coming in for the period he was there, which was really wartime. Bentley was very important during those years.

AWL: How long was he there?

MEH: Two years. Almost two years. Okay, in the postwar period you had this tremendous new influx of faculty so that the Albers influence is not that important, but you have people who really represent excellence in many respects. You have Lowinsky in music, you have—of course Jalowetz died right toward the end of

the War. But then you have someone like M.C. coming in in literature, who's really very exciting to the students. And it seems to me that that, the postwar period, was really the high point of the college where you had a fairly balanced faculty, people who, many people who could articulate a vision for the college which was one of the reasons I think there was so much conflict was there were different articulations.

AWL: Yes I agree. That's right.

MEH: Okay, it seems to me that the big conflict during the years Albers left—I mean really Albers really resigned. The idea was to get rid of Dreier. Albers resigned after Dreier's resignation was requested. [MEH: Dreier's resignation was requested from the Board of Fellows. He resigned from the faculty.]

AWL: Oh, I don't know anything about that.

MEH: But the idea at that point was—which I'm not that highly critical of—was that the college, which was really Albers' point of view at that point, that the college no longer could really support a general liberal arts curriculum and that they would offer basically courses in the arts with some other courses, which you would have strongly have disagreed with.

AWL: Yes, right. (OVERTALK)

MEH: Right. Okay, assuming though that—accepting this as his position, one thing that I agree with on Albers is that at least he did have a vision at that point. My feeling is about the period afterwards is that Trayer, Nell Rice, Natasha Goldowski, even though I'm sure that as people they were, you know—just as Joe Fiore was a

very good teacher—that none of them really could articulate a vision for the college in the sense that people had before.

AWL: Well you didn't need to articula—Your notion of articulating a vision seems to me slightly misplaced, because the very things that I talked about before, the two elements of vision up to those days were permanent at Black Mountain. One of them was the notion that it existed in an environment in which it was not only a college but it was a community, and it was unique in that. And that seemed to be only necessary to reiterate. The other thing which that tripartite nature was inherent in the very nature of Black Mountain. If you get rid of two of those, it's not Black Mountain anymore.

MEH: See, it seems you have all three of those things in the period after the Alberses left, the period which you found to be, the college had changed. '49-'50; '50-'51. You had the work program, you had the education program, you had the community aspect.

AWL: No, but you had an emphasis which would minimize the community aspect and maximize the college aspect—i.e., the conventional college aspect. So the notion of the importance of community as such—democratic decision, et cetera, et cetera, which went with the concept of community—that was gone.

MEH: But how was it gone? The faculty still had the same vote that they had had before. In a sense, it was maybe more democratic in that instead of having a rector, this sort of figurehead, you had a chairman of the faculty and a chairman of the Board of Fellows—Even though there was always this idea of looking for a rector. Actually there was no rector with no power.

AWL: No, but that—We're talking about the kind of vision. That was an interim period.

MEH: So you're saying just like Duberman, it was a period of transition.

AWL: Well, I wouldn't have called it a period of transition. I would say it's a period of decline, and it continued to decline.

MEH: I don't know that I would say "decline." I think there was—My feeling is, see my feeling is that those two—

AWL: There was no college after '52.

MEH: In those two years between '49 and say, '51, that it was a chance for the college really to grab hold of itself and to I say, "rearticulate a vision," but get some real new sense of itself. I mean this old guard having been gone at that point, who was really sort of a scapegoat for lots of things. But it seemed it really didn't. That people just fell to fighting amongst themselves.

AWL: Well that is the history. That's all that happened in Black Mountain from beginning to end, in a sense, was that. And the only periods that I was there in which it flourished was a time when those conflicts could come out and in one way or another be relatively resolved. When—One difficulty I think, again, was in the time in which John Wallen was there. He and I disagreed very, very strongly, because he—He was even more in favor of community at the expense of college, and I was more interested in keeping up the academic side as well as the community. Now there was an ideological conflict very clearly at that point. This, of course, was very interesting. Albers and Dreier were also suspicious of Wallen, as they would have been for anyone, do you understand, who presented a point of view. But what I'm trying to say was that here was a case in which the

community-college dilemma—John left because it wasn't sufficient community and people went with him to found not a college but a new community. But that was still a very fruitful thing, and it was fruitful because, for example, so far as I know there was no personal enmity between us. And even though students would go—I mean this was represented by the fact that I was more old-fashioned in my psychological commitment, namely I was more an orthodox Freudian and he was interested in Rank, and so from the student point of view there were two ideologies which were always fighting because they came up in alternative classrooms. But that was a kind of productive, do you understand, conflict. It was not personal, and it was given a kind of theoretical foundation which made it very exciting to the students. In short, there was enough disagreement so that there was excitement but not enough personal enmity to explode the situation. And I consider that Black Mountain at its best.

MEH: I agree. Okay, getting away from conflicts. What was it like to teach at Black Mountain?

AWL: Well, it was very, very good. I don't know exactly how to, to say it but on the whole very good students and—One of the two best classes I ever had was at Black Mountain, and that's quite a bit.

MEH: Which was that?

AWL: That was a course called The Individual in Society.

MEH: I have that on my list. What was it?

AWL: Well the actual—I can't say exactly. I know, of course, what the content of the course was, but it was the discussion—The materials were three books. We

started out with Ruth Benedict's Patterns of Culture and from that went to Karen Horney's The Neurotic Personality in [of] Our Time, and ended up with Kardiner, I think, and Linton's book on basic personality. And it was a very, very exciting bunch—it was large, for Black Mountain. Fifteen, eighteen. And we went at night, started about eight, and the class was supposed to be over at ten. And I think it was never over until close to twelve. And there were some very good students in it. Marion Rothman and Dawes Green and Dick Spahn. Harry Weitzer, Art Penn. Highly intellectual people. It was very—

MEH: Even though I might disagree at times with your politics, I must say that your students' description of your teaching is inevitably excellent.

AWL: Oh, well that's very nice of you to say.

MEH: So why would you describe that class as one of the best classes you've ever taught?

AWL: I don't know. How can you say that? That's very hard—Just in terms of catching fire, I think, and very, very good students, and the pure excitement. It sometimes happens. But most of those sessions were. And I'm certain when I left Black Mountain, there were many students who were very sorry it had occurred.

MEH: Are these photographs, by any chance?

AWL: Yeah.

MEH: From Black Mountain?

AWL: [AFFIRMATIVE]. [BREAK IN RECORDING] It's just by chance. Someone in the class took pictures. Okay. Those are pictures and photographs that I'm talking about.

MEH: The Studies Building with the white blackboard.

AWL: [AFFIRMATIVE] It's a lightboard [whiteboard?]. This is Chick Perrow, this is Art Penn, this is—the books are out [LAUGHS] that's how you can identify them.
Let's see, that's Marion Rothman, that's Dawes Green, that's Harry Weitzer.

MEH: Do you know who made the photographs?

AWL: I don't. I'm not sure. This is Dick Spahn. So that—(UNINTEL)

MEH: Can I see them?

AWL: Oh yes.

MEH: I love to look at pictures.

AWL: Okay. That's my Black Mountain period. I painted in those days.

MEH: So. I see.

AWL: This is a picture of M.C. and me.

MEH: It's a very good picture.

AWL: These are some more of the two of us. These are all [INAUDIBLE] Sorry to be so self-referential.

MEH: That's okay.

AWL: You asked to see my pictures.

MEH: I certainly did. Do you have any more?

AWL: I'm not sure. Those are the only ones I have in this batch. [BREAK IN RECORDING]

MEH: Okay, I'd asked you about teaching—what it was like. Did you find that the academic standards amongst your students were as high as, say, at a major university?

AWL: No. No, I don't think so. But it's hard to tell. You would find, occasionally, brilliant students. People like Penn and Spahn, I think, would rank with—Of course, they were older. I think they had come as G.I.s You would occasionally find some who were just as good, but they would I think be in a slow—You're talking about people at the academic level now, who do work in—But I don't think that in general that was the case. Of course, I came down from the University of Chicago, and students there were brilliant. But they were on the whole emotionally immature and I went to Black Mountain just to avoid that. So I wouldn't have felt the lack of brilliance as a serious lack. I was looking for something else—for whole people and (INAUDIBLE). One thing—Well, this is a document that you might be interested in, and it would tell you certain things. I don't know, I might be able to reproduce that for you. It's the talk that I gave as Rector at the beginning of school in 1947. It's called "The Meaning of Black Mountain," and it might be very revealing to you. Maybe I can get that xeroxed. I don't know. I have to think about whether I want to do it or not. No, I think one who left the University of Chicago to go down to Black Mountain wasn't precisely looking for—to find the University of Chicago when one got there.

MEH: Right.

AWL: And one of the difficulties too was that because of the different reasons for students coming down, the student body was—Some people came really primarily because they were interested in art or music, and they would not be very academically sophisticated. Others would—just the opposite. They would come for the academic side, and they would perhaps not be very sophisticated

as far as art and music were concerned. So it was a very heterogeneous student body in terms of its qualifications.

MEH: If you, for example, had wanted to teach a course like *The Individual in Society*—which I do have a course description of, that you wrote. It was in the college papers—say, at the University of Chicago, could you have gone to the administration and said, "This is what I want to teach?"

AWL: I don't think so.

MEH: Because you had a freedom at Black Mountain to structure your courses that you wouldn't have in a major—

AWL: No, that's certainly right. You could teach anything you wanted to teach, and that meant one could teach all over the map. If you had seen the total list of courses that I gave at Black Mountain, you wouldn't believe it. That is to say, you would have some difficulty in identifying my subject matter and commitment. I taught a course in Medieval Culture once; I taught a course called *Knowledge and Society* once.

MEH: What was *Knowledge and Society*?

AWL: I've forgotten now.

MEH: I think I have a description of that.

AWL: Maybe. I taught a course called *The Achievement of Marcel Proust*. I was very interested in Proust and went through *À la recherche* one term with some very interested kids. It was a lot of fun. Yes, you could—It was completely in essence cross-disciplinary—depended on what the kids were interested in doing and what

you were interested in doing, generally some kind of—So that there was no fixed curriculum, and that was a great advantage and a great disadvantage.

MEH: You were responsible for Paul Goodman's coming to Black Mountain.

AWL: Yes.

MEH: How would you—Had you known him before, or did you know his writing ?

AWL: Yes.

MEH: How had you known him?

AWL: Oh, we were friends going back at least to five years before I came to Black Mountain. I've forgotten exactly when I first met him. We had mutual friends for a long, long time back, but we had become quite good friends about I should think about 1941 or '42. And it was a case that I thought he would be good at Black Mountain, invited him, and would have been glad if he could have stayed.

MEH: That story has been gone over so many times of the fracas that summer so I won't ask you about it, unless you have some particular light to shed, or any perceptions.

AWL: The only thing that I remember is reading Duberman's account, which is in some sense false. I've forgotten even exactly in what respect. I don't think he had the facts quite right. What have you heard about it? What is the story?

MEH: Well basically Duberman's account, which I haven't read for so many years now I'm not sure I remember. But I guess, as I remember it—

AWL: There are many things in his book that seem to be purely inaccurate. But I felt so unhappy with the whole business that I—It's too bad to have that account as the kind of going account (?). Maybe someday I'll say something about what seemed

to be the errors of it, and that might be valuable, because it seems to me very biased and very one-sided, and it's because of his method. I would say one thing. I notice your own tendency, which I would resist as much as I could—I hope you'll not be influenced by his effort to be participant in the situation. "I agree with that." I disagree with that. For the writer of history, that's an unfortunate attitude, if you'll permit me to say so. What your job is, as an historian—if that's what you are—, and I am really talking to you in that capacity, is not to be a partisan, not to be a participant in the quarrel, but to try to understand as much as you can and present with as much accuracy and as narrow interpretive latitude—you understand—the way a historian would. And what seems to me to be the case in Duberman's book is he became a partisan and said so in the beginning: "That's what I'm going to do. I'm going to participate." And in many cases, it caused a real injustice. It's not only that he has a very, very strong personal bias against Erwin Straus and myself and a few others, which distorts what the real picture is.

MEH: You thought that he had a bias against you?

AWL: Oh, yes.

MEH: I'll have to reread. I was seeing—I thought I remembered he (?) was one of the people that he especially favored.

AWL: Oh no, no. Not at all. No. And it—Take a look at it again. Some of my friends seem—they've never said it to me—but they seem to have protested to him, when they read it in manuscript, because he has a footnote to that effect. But he says, "I still persist in my belief," and so the other opinions are not really put there at all. But there are reasons for that, once again, and—But, do you understand, if

you see the whole story—You must be very, very careful—that his competence, it seems to me, in terms of the position he takes, very seriously questioned. And I don't think it is very wise to enter these things as a participant. There's a certain kind of self-subordination which is necessary, whatever your—You have to be curious, but you have to be suspicious of what your own bias—That's what a good historian is. He says "What, in my own makeup and sense of identification, might cause me to distort—in Rankist [?] terms, be *"es eigentlich gewesen ist"*—what actually happened. And that permeates Duberman's account. Let me give you one instance, which I can be impersonal about because it happened before. His treatment of the whole Wunsch episode is enormously biased, and it's enormously biased by his own homosexuality. That would be the case where I would tend to sympathize with Ted Dreier very much and the rest of the community. Duberman says "Here is this poor man who's forced to leave in the middle of the night, and the community never came to his rescue." Well, twenty-five years, thirty years is a long time and changes take place, and so to speak the atmosphere, the liberal atmosphere of New York with respect to homosexuals—totally different than the South in 1945. And it was—again I'm sure, everyone felt badly about it. They liked him personally, and I am sure that if Ted had to make a choice, it was the choice of keeping the college going. If that—Once he saw the seeds of destruction, if that had become public, and when this deal apparently was made—he leaves at once and nothing else will be said—it was a salvation of the—Maybe mistaken, you understand, but this was not a question of personal sympathy. If you say "Well, if the college goes under,

who cares, but we will stand by this man," in those days that was not a tenable position. That's the kind of thing, and there are many more things. I think I told you one of them. The importance which Duberman gives to Wallen is totally out of proportion to what his influence was. He was only there a short time. There was some influence. But this becomes one of the major episodes in the college, and I think it very doubtful if any but those who left with him would say "Yes, indeed. That was one of the major episodes." I wouldn't have considered it as one of the major ones in the total four-year period. And there is more of the same kind of thing. He is very biased in favor of the merely avant-garde. He is interested in one side, which is one kind of education—not the only kind of education at Black Mountain. So what I'm really trying to say is that if you want to write—I assume that you want to write a fair—am I right?

MEH: I hope so.

AWL: And open account, I think you must be very, very careful trying to find out just what the perceptions of individuals are of one another as ingredient in the situation itself. Do you understand what—? I'm not quite sure, but I think that Duberman, part of the difficulty was that I made his task harder for him, and I'm not sure that he—quite apart from what he said—

MEH: How was that?

AWL: Well, he wanted originally to interview me by telephone, and that seems to be much too impersonal. I didn't like the idea. I much prefer a kind of—And he apparently, although I didn't know it at the time, had pretty well made up his mind about things when he came out. But he had a very uncomfortable trip out, and

I'm sure he holds me responsible for it. He is a very phobic man, and he can't travel on airplanes, apparently, so he came out—A summer in St. Louis is just dreadful, and you could imagine what the trains are without air conditioning. Took a train, I don't know, 26 hours or something from New York, and he arrived in a dreadful state and it was very hot, and I'm sure that he considered me uncooperative in causing that to happen. And there are other things too that are even less pleasant. But we don't have any kind of situation of that sort, and if you do see it as situational, if you can get out yourself of this "devil theory," which seems to me to be one of the dangers of—I don't see it so much as heroes and villains. I see much of it as situational in terms of what the local situation demanded.

MEH: Getting back to Black Mountain, I had asked you about Goodman. You were also responsible for Isaac Rosenfeld being at Black Mountain, weren't you?

AWL: I think so.

MEH: The information I had was that you and M.C. had taken some students up to—now this I've just pieced together; I'm asking for the connection now—to the Arts Forum in Greensboro, and I think he was part of it—one of the speakers or judges, and then he was there the next summer, and I'm just wondering if there was a connection and perhaps you had met him there and asked him.

AWL: I don't remember. I guess that must be the case. It's confused because M.C. and I almost every year went to the arts conference at Greensboro. That's where we met Trilling and Blackmur and a few others. Jarrell, who was there. And we may have met Isaac one of the times.

MEH: To your knowledge, was Jarrell ever at Black Mountain?

AWL: I don't think so.

MEH: Another question. When you were in Austria, where were you? Was it there where you went for your sabbatical?

AWL: Which sabbatical?

MEH: The year that—the '48-'49 year. Where were you?

AWL: Oh no, no. We were in France.

MEH: You were in France. Where were you? Were you teaching, or—

AWL: No, no. Well, we spent the fall and a good part of the winter in the South of France, just back of Cannes. And then we went up to Paris and spent I think February and March up to the middle of April. We came for four weeks to Italy over Easter vacation—spent two weeks in Venice and two weeks in Florence. And we went back to Paris, and I've forgotten now how long we were there, and then we went to England. And we came back from England to the United States. But I was trying to—The only thing that is uncertain about the Goodman thing that you were talking about—I've forgotten, I'll have to look again and see what it is and—I would be very interested in what the other perceptions—Have you talked to Ray Trayer?

MEH: No. Do you know where he is?

AWL: No I don't.

MEH: Another thing. That reminds me I was going to ask you about is do you have correspondence with people who were at Black Mountain? Any type of documentation of that sort?

AWL: No. I have a couple of letters, yes, that people like D[orothy] Cole and Dawes Green—very unlikely people, in a way, wrote appreciative letters.

MEH: But you wouldn't have people like—correspondence with people like Trayer the year you were in Europe.

AWL: Oh, no. I mean, since I was knocked down by him, we were not in very—from that point on, we were not very—Of course, that was later. But one thing that there does seem to be some disagreement about, and it's a matter of his motives. That has never been completely clear.

MEH: In terms of you, or Dreier. [MEH: Trayer]

AWL: No, no. Knocking me down. The meeting—

MEH: You mean that particular meeting. Right.

AWL: Yeah. [AFFIRMATIVE] And I'm not entirely sure myself, because that was the meeting in which the whole faculty was offended by our proposal that Paul be hired permanently, and the only people, the only faculty members, in favor that I remember—this is, you know, the things that are emotionally charged you do indeed . [LAUGHS] You know, I'm not sure if you remember them accurately, but you do indeed remember them, and I don't know what the vote shows. I'd be very interested to know. But my recollection is that M.C. and myself and Joe Fiore and the student moderator voted in favor, and everybody else without exception was opposed to having Paul, because of the homosexual issue. And I'm sure that Ray Trayer was scandalized by the proposal that he come, but also at that meeting—I don't remember very well, but I do remember that there was some question as to whether the farm was an economically viable thing, and I'm sure I said something

to the effect that "Well, if it doesn't improve, we'll have to give up the farm." And he, of course, was the farmer which means "We'll have to give up the farmer." Which was far from diplomatic. So that in my own mind, I thought that it was primarily the statement I had made about the farm that infuriated me [SIC], but Paul thought that it, that he was a rather straitlaced man and that he was infuriated at the advocacy of his, Paul's, candidacy. So that's the kind of thing. How do you impute motives? We have to talk to Trayer and ask what was it that caused the—which I have never known. That would be interesting. Not interesting to anybody else, but it would be interesting to me in terms of motivation.

MEH: When you left Black Mountain, you left at the end of the fall semester in '50, '50 fall semester or early '51, I believe.

AWL: Yes. Before Christmas.

MEH: Where did you go?

AWL: Well, I was at loose ends because I had no job, and my marriage was really at an end, and everything going to pieces all at once. And so I was in a very unhappy state. And so I mostly tried to look for a job, but M.C. and I had a mutual friend—

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

AWL: And I would have gotten the government job and security clearance. In those days it took six months, nine months. And finally everything came through at the same time—both the Fulbright and the government job, and I took the Fulbright. But academic jobs were very hard to get, although I did get one here and had to decide whether to come here or take the Fulbright and so forth. And so I've been

here ever since. But I was more or less around in the eastern area—Washington, Philadelphia, New York, that whole spring. Interviewing people in Washington for government jobs, interviewing in New York for other kinds. I think one of the editors of Fortune—I had done some public opinion work before—was interested. You know, the details of just where I went are difficult, but I was very grateful to our friends in Philadelphia for—I had no home, no place to keep Estelle at the time, so that was a real act of friendship. One of the times that I was most needy in my life.

MEH: I'm sort of running out of questions. Do you think there are things that we haven't talked about that we should?

AWL: No, I don't think so. I mean, that's really up to you. But I'm more interested in what—Are you really—? The thing that puzzles me is that you seem to be very concerned about things that don't have very much to do with art. Why is that?

MEH: Okay, I'm interested for two reasons. [BREAK IN RECORDING]

AWL: Duberman's business seemed to me so distorted is that there is very little about people like Dehn or Hansgirg, who taught chemistry. Elliot Merrick, who taught English, Herbert Mueller [SIC Miller], who taught social science. Erwin Straus, who taught psychology. Walcott, who taught history. Do you understand? Do read his account, there all—the largest number, it's a kind of virtuoso approach which is not the real approach. There are virtuosos in terms of outside reputation, but that's not what Black Mountain was and that's not what went into it. And there's a great temptation to do a great deal of name-dropping, and this is where, for

example, the—if you will pardon me for saying it—in the whole history of the college, Olson is totally unimportant. As a college—

MEH: I would disagree.

AWL: I know you would, but that's because of a small group of, very small group . .

MEH: Why would you—You tell me why you say this.

AWL: Because Black Mountain College was already on its way—In '52, it was—Who was at the college in the year '53-'54?

MEH: In '53-'54, Stefan Wolpe, Joe Fiore, Robert Creeley, Olson—Who else? I would have to—There weren't many more (OVERTALK) probably.

AWL: And how many students?

MEH: '53-'54? '53-'54, maybe fifteen students. I've done a list, actually, of the '50s.

AWL: Can you call that still a college? With fifteen students?

MEH: Well, how would you define a "college"? I mean, see, I agree, I would basically agree with you that many—the college was on a decline and that—

AWL: I wouldn't call that Black Mountain College, really, anymore. I'm sorry. Because when a student body had decreased to that level, it's a group of friends. It's a—It's something, but I don't think I would call it a college any longer. Now mind you, if you say "Well, how many hairs make a beard?" Just at what point you say it's a college or it's not a college. There would be perhaps a certain point at which one would say "Well I'm not quite sure of that." But about fifteen, I feel pretty sure that is not—

MEH: Classes were held, and grade cards filled out, so see I'm not sure that—I mean I'm sure that if we moved from terms like "this is a college" and "this isn't a

college," we might be more in agreement. That's probably where I would disagree with you.

AWL: Yeah. Well, if you—See already when we returned from Europe, I'm not sure but I think there were maybe between 35, maybe 35—

MEH: I have a list, but I don't remember.

AWL: Yeah. Well but already, one really wondered if this was a college anymore. Do you understand? Even in those days. Cut that again by more than half, and then one is pretty sure. You have an interesting artistic community, but I don't think you have a college anymore. I don't think—And whether you go through the motions of having forms to fill out and so forth and so on, it seems to me to more or less beside the point. I suppose that was done for tax purposes as much as anything else, or, you know, so they'd be tax-exempt. You can preserve that. But most of the students—How many of the students were there on scholarships?

MEH: It's hard to say. I mean there were a large number on scholarships, without doubt, but also they were still getting GI Bill. They were getting GI Bill from the Korean War.

AWL: Yeah. How many—That of course—

MEH: There were quite a few veterans there who were getting money from that. And there were some students who were paying full tuition and others pay—quite a few paying less. See, I don't see that as a measure of whether it was a college as to how many people had scholarships.

AWL: Well, it is a measure in this sense—that if you have some kind of generalized recruitment and people come, then you will have a rather heterogeneous group

of students, and you'll have a certain natural number who get fellowships. But if you find a disproportionate number, then that lends credence to Nell Rice and the others' charges that people are given scholarships to preserve the appearance of a college for purposes which don't have very much to do with the ordinary educational situation. That's exactly what the charge was, and that's all I know, because I wasn't there and was no—But I would like to have that refuted sometime, you understand? And if you say "Well there were fifteen people there," that's a little bit larger than the number I was given to understand was there, but that itself is sufficiently small so it lends more credence, you understand, so it causes me to say "Well, how many of those had come down and paid their own money, to come down for an educational experience? How many were subsidized to come, who found it enjoyable talking to, I guess, Olson and Creeley, or doing their potting." Do you understand, whatever it was. But in what sense was there any intellectual content?

MEH: I think that (OVERTALK) One thing that—

AWL: A college is not an art school either.

MEH: Okay. Well at that point, essentially the college had become—the faculty was in the arts. I mean, I've forgotten, Weinrib and Karnes were still there then.

AWL: Okay, but at that moment—

MEH: But at that point it was basically a [INTERRUPTION]

AWL: I'm sorry we're having guests for dinner tonight and so—Okay that's all right. I'd be glad to talk with you further—

[END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]