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Introduction

In 1972, Martin Duberman published his landmark history of Black Mountain College, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*. The first edition, published by E.P. Dutton and designed by Roy Kuhlman, was dressed in a black, minimalist jacket adorned with two illustrations of concentric wave patterns.¹ This book would have looked right at home on the shelves of experimental composer John Cage. Indeed, like many others in Black Mountain's orbit, Cage—who visited the college as part of his tour with Merce Cunningham in the spring of 1948 and returned to teach during the summer sessions of 1948 and 1952—owned a copy of Duberman's history. Nearly fifty years later, the online antiquarian bookshop Royal Books lists Cage's copy among its merchandise. A handwritten inscription from Cage explains the book's \$650 price-tag. Along with his name, Cage noted on the front flyleaf: "This is a book I haven't read."²

Who knows in what spirit (or for whom) Cage made this note in Duberman's book, but it is certainly a coup for both Royal Books and those of us interested in the historiography of Black Mountain College. Cage's flippant note, pictured below, implies that Duberman's Black Mountain narrative left something to be desired and raises the question: *what kind of Black Mountain history would John Cage actually have read?*

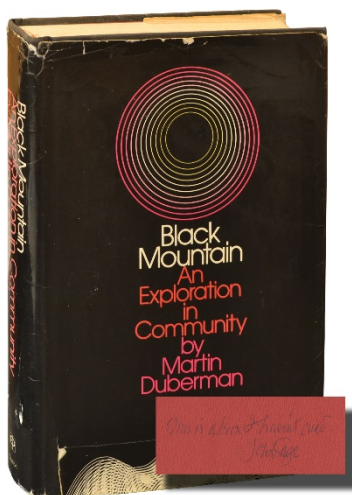


Figure 1. Inscribed copy of *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* by Martin Duberman. Courtesy of Royal Books.

This is not a wholly rhetorical question. For, in the decade after the college shuttered its doors, Cage championed a different historian of Black Mountain, Mary Caroline "M.C." Richards. Encouraged by Cage and driven by her own fascination with the college's history, Richards spent years trying to historicize the college where she taught from 1945 to 1951 as a professor of English. Richards's turn as a Black Mountain historian has been little remarked upon in the college's literature. This erasure of her work is enabled both by her decision, in the late 1960s, to donate her notes and research to Duberman and by the subsequent relegation of her historical practice to the archive.³

Without a completed book "to study, ponder, and taste again and again"—to paraphrase Daniel Rhodes's review of *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person*, her 1964 opus—it is possible to miss Richards's contributions altogether.⁴ Her unwritten Black Mountain book is something of a ghost, a flickering thing. To quote Emily Dickinson, it is "The Drop, that wrestles in the Sea --". I will argue that, like a drop of water in a pool, Richards's work is elemental to what Black Mountain historiography and research have become. Yet this work is also capable of astounding acts of disappearance within that larger pool. What makes Richards's work so liable to liquefy and to be absorbed? Since her decision in the sixties to bequeath her work to Duberman, Richards has been the frequent victim of critical neglect and bias. My efforts to find palpable traces of her work in Duberman's archive and work have been largely unsuccessful. While her extraordinary project rings out in her personal paper trail, in the context of other people's work, Richards tends to disappear—water in water.

In this essay, I present research that I conducted at the Western Regional Archives, the Getty Research Institute, and the New York Public Library (NYPL) in an attempt to rescue Richards from the proverbial margins and footnotes. Using the archive as my basis, I imagine the Black Mountain history that Richards intended to write and perhaps would have written if timing, inspiration, and support had properly aligned. My sources are varied—I use letters, interviews, notes, grant applications, and passages in her published works to picture the historical practice that Richards developed. My primary intention in this essay is to corral these scattered references and

traces to illuminate what Richards's book could have been and reveal what a profound and prophetic Black Mountain scholar she was.

For the sake of legibility and to honor the breadth of Richards's efforts, I refer throughout this essay to her "Black Mountain book." As this essay consists of speculative thinking about an unwritten text, my use of the term "book" is something of a misnomer. Therefore, my decision to refer to her work as a book is an effort to restore to Richards her authority and agency in a field which frequently occludes her. Yet it also emerges from my familiarity with Richards's oeuvre—her books have the capacity to shapeshift.

Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person is a prime example. Her most famous work continues to trouble set boundaries and definitions. A cursory study of how online book retailers categorize *Centering* reveals a dizzying array of identifications. Amazon files *Centering* under the genres of "Pottery & Ceramics," "Literature & Fiction," and "Self-Help."⁵ Google Books lists *Centering* as a work of "Body, Mind, & Spirit," "Pottery & Ceramics," "Poetry," and "Self-Help/Personal Growth."⁶

Take the following anecdote as further proof of *Centering's* penchant for transformation. In 1968, Karen Shirley, a ceramics teacher at Antioch College in Ohio, wrote to Richards requesting her attendance at a conference the college was hosting that year entitled "Current Theories in Higher Education." Shirley asked if Richards would speak at the conference on the topic of the student-teacher relationship. Other invited speakers included Paul Goodman and Stoughton Lynd. In the letter, Shirley expresses her and the Antioch student body's enthusiasm about Richards's work, writing:

We need your knowledge as an artist-teacher; first, because our students' increasing anti-intellectualism leads them especially to classes in the Arts and, second, because your teaching methods have been very successful. Although many students here see the pot shop as the last stop in "pure sensation," they will read Centering – but no other books. The library complains bitterly that their copy is covered with clay and is always over-due.⁷

Shirley's revelation that *Centering* was the only book that the Antioch students of 1968 would read is a striking testament to Richards's historical and cultural relevance in a period of great unrest in higher education. Equally meaningful for my purposes in this essay is Shirley's description of *Centering* as a book with the capacity to exist in multiple realms, both materially and intellectually. Richards's signature work appealed to such an array of students and thinkers that it disrupted the procedures of the library. Such a book could not be kept clean nor returned on time. Yet its relevance to students of all disciplines prohibited its permanent relocation to the pottery studio's shelves. Richards's expansive philosophy of pottery (and poetry...and life itself...) situated *Centering* in a liminal space between the studio and the library. The students of Antioch could not help but shuttle it back and forth continuously.

In Richards's world, nothing was static. Even clay—earth itself—was fundamentally mutable and in a state of constant transformation from dirt to mud to water to fired object.⁸ As a nod to this tradition, I will refer to Richards's Black Mountain work variously as a book, a history, a project, an autobiography, a portrait, and a failure. More important than nomenclature, however, is Richards's prophetic historical imagination, which for years has been concealed in the archive. When one digs through the archive, remnants of Richards's scholarship rush forward and paint a picture of a radical historian with a unique story to tell of Black Mountain College.

In this essay, I describe how Richards came to be interested in writing a book about Black Mountain, in what ways she worked on the project, why she decided to set the project aside, and how she continued to pursue questions of Black Mountain's history moving forward.

Throughout the essay, I argue that Richards anticipated the major thematic approaches that now characterize literature on Black Mountain and suggest that it was often her prescience that seeded her project's downfall. Where Duberman challenged the medium of history by inserting his diary entries into *Black Mountain*, Richards intuited that the legacy of Black Mountain was inseparable from the subjective beliefs and experiences of the college's participants (including herself). Where Mary Emma Harris and Helen Molesworth have sought to cull the vast array of artistic practices fostered by the college, Richards, as early as 1960, aimed to bring together the eclectic

voices of Black Mountain artists. In these and many other ways, Richards—the potter, the poet, the teacher, the painter, the communitarian, and the farmer—appears now as one of the foundational figures of Black Mountain historiography. Yet unlike subsequent historians of Black Mountain, Richards struggled to find an audience for her ideas. She was met with hostility from former colleagues, interview subjects, editors, publishers, and even friends.

This essay is arranged in four sections. In the first, I argue that the foregrounding of the personal perspective is the trademark of the Black Mountain historian. While Richards was among the first to center her subjective viewpoint in her historical work, her highly personal approach was read at the time as threatening by her potential collaborators and impinged upon her book's future.

In the second section, I posit that a queer thread runs through Black Mountain historiography and that to acknowledge the resonance of queer politics and theory in Black Mountain literature is to expand our understanding of the college and to make room for Richards's contribution to the canon. Though I partially attribute the queerness of Black Mountain history to Duberman's dual status as the college's foundational historian and an out gay man, I am interested in queerness not as a category of sexual identification but as a political and theoretical field of liberation and resistance. I draw upon the work of José Esteban Muñoz, Jack Halberstam, and Gavin Butt, as well as Black Mountain scholars such as Helen Molesworth, to locate Richards's radical and anti-institutional crafting of history.

In the third section, I describe how Richards eventually set aside the task of telling Black Mountain history. I frame this decision as the consequence of her own shifting interests as well as a reaction to the censorial impulses of her publishers and supporters.

In the fourth and final section of the essay, I turn to Richards's ongoing relationship with Black Mountain history. I argue that, from the remnants of her book project, Richards innovated an open-ended form of philosophical inquiry into the college's history that informed her life, work, and community. I name this practice "black mountain history" and contend that through it, Richards rewrote the college's potential meaning. Working outside of the strictures of the mainstream academic and publishing

worlds, Richards folded her historical inquiries into the fiber of her life, which was defined by her commitment to the transformative powers of material, craft, and emotional curiosity. Her holistic approach allowed her to understand the college outside of the bounds of both chronological and geographic specificity as well as factual objectivity. She saw Black Mountain less as a physical campus or as a particular community and more as the inspiration for a philosophical practice that was grounded in the college's founding principles. Her unpinning of the college from its material and historical boundaries bears far-ranging consequences for how we understand the college today.

"We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking"

In her introductory essay to *Leap Before You Look*, editor and curator Helen Molesworth asks: "What was it about Black Mountain that led Duberman to insert himself and his own point of view and identity so thoroughly into his historical account of the college? And why have I continued this tradition of embedding self-doubt into my own attempt to come to terms with the myth of the college?"⁹ Molesworth's questions are among the most pressing of Duberman scholarship and Black Mountain historiography, yet rarely have they been considered in the context of Richards's work as a historian of the college. As Molesworth experiences herself and observes in Duberman's work, making and breaking myths about the storied college is facilitated by an embrace of the personal. What has become a tradition among Black Mountain scholars was arguably pioneered by Richards, who injected her personal perspective into her historical work.

Molesworth designates Duberman as the progenitor of the personal approach. Throughout *Black Mountain*, Duberman brings in his own perspective, memories, and opinions. A quotation from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* serves as the book's resounding epigraph:

In most books, the *I*, or first person, is omitted; in this it will be retained; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it

is, after all, always the first person that is speaking. I should not talk so much about myself if there were anybody else whom I knew as well.¹⁰

Like Thoreau, Duberman sees the removal of the first person from "most books" as artificial, for an individual voice inevitably shapes all writing. In addition to utilizing the first person throughout the book, he quotes frequently from his own diaries and weaves his takes into transcripts of community debates.¹¹ The introduction to *Black Mountain* serves as a de facto manifesto for Duberman's historical methodology. In this opening text, Duberman establishes the vocalization of the personal perspective as "the historian's way" and explains that

the issue is not, I believe, *whether* the individual historian should appear in his books, but *how* he should appear—covertly or overtly. Every historian knows that he manipulates the evidence to some extent simply because of who he is...¹²

He suggests that readers and scholars stop debating the existence of the historian's personal perspective and begin determining how best to wield the subjective voice. One of the most striking features of this introduction-cum-manifesto is Duberman's free use of the masculine pronoun. Though a standard grammatical convention at the time, his gendering of the historian-subject echoes unfortunately with the story of Richards's failed book.

Years before Duberman made these declarations, Richards embraced the personal perspective as a force in writing history. While Duberman was widely acknowledged and sometimes praised for doing the same, Richards's merging of the subjective and objective contributed to the failure of her *Black Mountain* project.

From its inception, Richards's history of *Black Mountain* hovered on the boundary between the personal and the scholarly-professional. Talking to Mary Emma Harris in 1972, Richards characterized her book as the means by which she sought to heal the wounds she suffered at *Black Mountain*'s failure.

I was very connected with the college, you know. I was very connected and missed my friends and wanted to see them and keep in touch. I didn't really

make a separation from the college until...I decided not to write the Black Mountain book. It must have been about 1966, about ten years it took me, about ten years to separate from that real tremendous identification and involvement and feeling of responsibility. I think that...some of us suffered...when the college suffered so much and came to an end, we felt personally responsible, that somehow we could have prevented it or should have prevented it or "What could I have done?" or "Why?", you know.¹³

In this description, Richards figures her decision not to write the book as the end of an extended period of mourning and attachment to Black Mountain. The book was the receptacle into which she poured her dedication to the college. The writing of Black Mountain history was inseparable from her personal reckoning with the institution's legacy in her life.

Richards's complex feelings of attachment not only incited her project. Her "tremendous identification and involvement" also wove their way into her historical methodology. In a 1961 letter to Rex Aragon, one of her teachers from her undergraduate years at Reed College and an employee at the Ford Foundation, she wrote: "I am qualified, I think, in some real if undefinable way, to tell the truth about [Black Mountain]."¹⁴ Richards did not cite her presence at the college during some of its most formative years nor her familiarity with the archive as preparing her for the project. Rather, she emphasized her emotive and instinctual, not practical, qualifications.

John Cage played a role in helping her appreciate this "undefinable" capacity to "tell the truth." She recalled in a letter from the early 1960s that, upon Cage's return to the Gate Hill Cooperative from a trip to Wesleyan, they had the following interaction:

He said to me, 'You must write a book about Black Mountain College; everyone at Wesleyan is asking about it.' I replied that I had indeed thought of doing such a work but that I am not a historian nor a sociologist, that I am not interested in the past, etc...But it was John's view that all this was to my advantage...So, again at John's suggestion, I wrote a letter to the Ford Foundation asking for support of this project.¹⁵

Cage was drawn to Richards's unique *inabilities*—she was neither "a historian nor a sociologist...[and] not interested in the past"—and he hoped that her unorthodox approach would embolden her to capture the spirit of the college.

In a book proposal that she sent to Aragon, her methodical outlining of her book's planned contents devolves into a vivid description of her dreams. This is the first:

I am sitting at a large oval table with many people: my colleagues from Black Mountain (the college had closed, and we are gathered to discuss it). I am standing and speaking, water is cascading down from my eyes, but my speech is unimpaired by my grief; I am mobile and lucid. 'No one wanted the college to close,' I am saying...¹⁶

By describing her dreams in a formal plea for funding, Richards makes obvious her belief that her inner world—her fantasies, her emotions—could enliven and strengthen her project. In her embrace of the overlaps between the personal and the historical, the subjective and objective, the past and the present, Richards exhibited a stunning foresight about how Black Mountain would develop as a historical subject. Much as *Black Mountain* freely discloses Duberman's "feelings, fantasies and needs" and *Leap Before You Look* is dappled by Molesworth's "self-doubt," Richards's emotional investment and intuitive approach were to be front and center in her Black Mountain book.¹⁷

When Richards began to reach out to members of the Black Mountain community for interviews, she was treated with disdain, primarily because her highly personal approach was perceived as more of an insult than a boon. In 1961, she contacted Ted and Bobbie Dreier and Anni and Josef Albers and asked to sit down with the couples to discuss the college. In September of that year, she received replies from Ted and Anni, both rejections. Ted wrote a lengthy letter explaining his thoughts on the prospect of the book and recounting how busy and preoccupied he and Bobbie were at the moment. He hesitantly told her to "try your hand if you must, if it is truly right for you to do and God-speed," but his final stance on the matter could be summed up in the following line: "you participated only in the decline and death of the college."¹⁸ Two weeks later, Anni came to a similar conclusion. Her letter was characteristically blunt.

She wrote to Richards that she and Josef "feel...that you came to Black Mountain College at the time of its decline. Your direct experience could therefore only cover that period. The building up period was, of course, the interesting one and should be written about some day by one of the founders."¹⁹ While Ted suggested that Richards write a book about her "fresh teaching" instead of Black Mountain, Anni summarily rejected Richards's query.²⁰

Ultimately, the Dreiers and Alberses believed that Richards was ill-equipped to write the book, not because she was, as she herself said, neither a historian nor a sociologist, but because of her particular involvement in the college's life. Though it is likely that both couples had long lists of Black Mountain participants whom they deemed responsible for the "decline and death of the college," in the context of these letters, their tone is strikingly accusatory. Ted accepted that the college would inspire a great many works of history. That someone other than himself would write about Black Mountain was not the issue—the problem was the story of the college that Richards would tell. He pressed her to write about something that she knew better.²¹ Anni suggested that Ted was the one for the job and was miffed at Richards's audacity at seeing herself capable of the work. In the eyes of the Dreiers and Alberses, Richards's unique perspective was not an asset, but an offense.

Her failure to secure interviews with the college's big personalities was one of the main factors in Richards's decision to set the project aside. Though her historical methodology, infused as it was with the personal, remarkably prefigured one of the resounding characteristics of writing on Black Mountain, it dealt a major blow to her project. Without the insight of the Dreiers and Alberses, she could hardly continue with the project. She did, however, make enough progress on the book that a number of authors, including Harris and Duberman, were interested in getting their hands on her notes. Duberman won Richards's favor and published *Black Mountain* a few years later to moderate acclaim. Asked why Duberman secured Richards's notes over her, Harris concluded: "I cannot write M.C.'s book on Black Mountain."²² Though it might strike us now as contrary to feminist logics of mutual uplift, Jenni Sorkin has suggested that Richards's decision to bequeath her notes and "intellectual labor" to Duberman and not Harris was due to her lifelong attachment to and interest in queer men.²³

"I will now act as husband and wife to these dilemmas" ²⁴

This brings me to the second theme I identify in Richards's book, which is its manifestation of her queer historical approach. To my knowledge, Sorkin was the first to highlight the queer resonances in Richards's work and life.²⁵ In *Live Form*, Sorkin argues that in her embeddedness in a community of queer men, such as John Cage, David Tudor, and Merce Cunningham, and through her collaborative, process art in clay, Richards pioneered the "burgeoning 1950s queer aesthetic, though she herself was not queer."²⁶ I agree with Sorkin's evaluation of Richards's interdisciplinary practice and believe that it is deepened in the context of her unwritten book, which was to be anti-institutional in form and radical in its deep-dive into the interstices of history and futurity. These characteristics, in combination with the failures that Richards both suffered and celebrated and the book's haphazard existence today in the ephemeral archive, constitute a striking link to contemporary queer politics and theory, which are a persistent presence in Black Mountain literature.

In Black Mountain historiography, the historian's embrace of the personal inevitably runs into the realm of queerness. Duberman's status as one of the foundational Black Mountain historians means that queer questions are written into the college's historical record. On one level, this is a matter of identity. In *Black Mountain*, Duberman freely discloses his sexual orientation and engages his identity in the analysis of his subject.²⁷ However, as Jason Ezell discusses in the essay "Martin Duberman's Queer Historiography and Pedagogy," published in this journal, there is more to Duberman's queer approach than the act of coming out. *Black Mountain* reflects the historian's efforts to integrate his academic, political, and sexual selves. This journey is imprinted in the texture of his work—he quotes from his diary, names his sexual identity, reflects on his work as a professor at Princeton in the late sixties, and, most importantly for our purposes, he utilizes Black Mountain College as a nascent playground for queering the medium of history. Ezell writes that Black Mountain provided "a fruitful opportunity for [Duberman's] own change—a change towards a politicized public sexual identity, a change towards innovation in his own history-writing, and a change towards a radically anti-authoritarian stance concerning traditional university pedagogies."²⁸ Through putting himself in honest dialogue with the questions

and tensions of Black Mountain, Duberman created a space for himself to be openly gay and to alter the medium of history so as to align it more with his political and sexual truth.²⁹ Though the historic Black Mountain community could be hostile to queer people, the college that Duberman describes in his book is queer.³⁰

Traces of Duberman's queer Black Mountain continue to emerge in the work of other scholars. In the introduction to *Leap Before You Look*, Molesworth confronts what she calls Black Mountain's "queer light."³¹ She describes her work in the archive as having been frustratingly conflicted. While her research yielded a body of seemingly discrete facts that she could shape into a historical narrative, it also confronted her with an unwieldy mass of rumors, hints, and gossip that she says "cast a queer light on 'official' documents" and destabilized the narrative she strove to consolidate.³² In time, "the line between a historical document and gossip began to blur."³³

Molesworth's designation of this methodological challenge as queer suggests that there is something intrinsic to the study of Black Mountain College that evokes queerness. After all, her reference to queerness comes not in a description of the college's gay students or teachers, but in a reflection on the nature of the archive (she recalls experience at the Western Regional Archives as well as at the Getty Research Institute, working in M.C. Richards's papers). In this way, Molesworth serves to relocate queerness from the bounds of personal sexual identification and into a realm of theoretical and political analysis.

She underscores this rethinking of queerness—and gestures towards Richards's place in the arena of queer politics and theory—in her description of the sources she employed to grapple with her work's formal uncertainty. First, she expresses gratitude for scholars like Irit Rogoff and Gavin Butt, whose feminist and queer theoretical work on the topic of gossip helped her understand that any history of Black Mountain would inevitably be "structured by polyphony, fragments, and a narrative strategy of alloverness."³⁴ Second, she quotes Karen Karnes—a Black Mountain potter and a friend of Richards's—who, when interviewed by Molesworth, exasperatedly declared: "You contemporary people have so many questions, because you think there are answers."³⁵ Drawing upon her wisdom as a lifelong potter and a participant in the

college, Karnes advises Molesworth to embrace uncertainty and unknowability—phenomena she recognizes as fundamental.

Molesworth's citation of Rogoff and Butt sets precedence for my own framing of Richards as a queer historian, despite the fact that she did not publicly identify as anything other than straight and, for much of her life, engaged in heterosexual relationships. Both Rogoff and Butt advocate for the critical embrace of scuttlebutt, seeing in this much-disparaged mode of communication "a radical model of postmodern knowledge" (Rogoff) and "a form of pre-Stonewall queer subjectivity" (Butt).³⁶ Their work operates from the belief that inferred and overheard knowledge is not only valuable to the history of art, but that it constitutes a rebuff to and a subversion of traditional historical narratives and their evidentiary bases.

Butt's work, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948–1963*, is especially useful for its characterization of queer identity in the historical moment in which Richards was working on her book. The periodization of *Between You and Me* aligns with Richards's Black Mountain timeline: she lived and worked at the college from 1945 to 1951 and toyed with writing its history until the early 1960s. Butt characterizes this pre-Stonewall, Cold War moment in American history as one in which the enforcement of heterosexuality was at a fever pitch and the politics of gay liberation had yet to enter the public discourse. In this moment, gossip and rumor offered an important refuge, especially for artists, from the strictures of cold war American culture and nurtured the development of queer subjectivities that are often rendered invisible today because of the dominance of "the closet's binary structure of signification."³⁷ When Richards was engaging with Black Mountain history, queer sexuality was something diffuse, surreptitious, and radically expansive. Therefore, there is something backwards about demanding that Richards fit neatly into a category of sexual identity—lesbian, gay, queer, what have you—in order to interpret her work as queer, given how these categories were neither well-defined nor safely a part of public discourses at the time.

Even those in Richards's milieu who were clearly queer (and there were many) identified their sexual and romantic practices in ways that may appear inscrutable to us now. Look, for example, at John Cage. As Jonathan D. Katz notes in his essay "John

Cage's Queer Silence; Or, How to Avoid Making Matters Worse," "John Cage never did quite come out of the closet."³⁸ Katz draws a parallel between Cage's aesthetic innovations and his sexual identity, suggesting that silence was not only his artistic inspiration, but also his form of resistance to both a hostile heterosexual culture and the restricting logics of the closet.³⁹ Katz makes it clear that even the most recognizably queer figures of Richards's generation (and intimate social circle) resisted categorization and expressed their sexual identities in subtle and varied ways. It is with this historical context in mind that I both acknowledge Richards's apparent straightness *and* tender my interpretation of Richards's historical work as queer.



Figure 2. (from left) Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, M.C. Richards, and Jasper Johns, 1958. *The New York Times*, February 4, 2001: "Cage Was Not Only All Ears, He Was All Eyes, Too." Bob Cato/Courtesy of George Avakian.

I now wish to return to Karen Karnes and the resolution she offers to Molesworth's archival conundrum. By yielding to Karnes when discussing Black Mountain's queer light, Molesworth hints at a remarkable connection between the college's women ceramists and queer historiography. The above photo of, from left, Robert Rauschenberg, Merce Cunningham, John Cage, M.C. Richards, and Jasper Johns, taken in 1958, pictures this connection. Gavin Butt and Jonathan D. Katz belong to a cadre of scholars who work to elucidate the queer currents running through art history. This scholarship frequently casts its gaze onto Rauschenberg, Cunningham, Cage, and Johns. Where is Richards in this research? *Sandwiched between Cage and Johns—tucked behind Cage, obscured by his expanse of hair and protruding ear—really just a sliver of a person, where exactly does her torso end? Or her legs begin?—*

her hands tenderly, hesitantly gripping her friend, not stuffed into the pockets of a suit nor prominently displayed. In other words, in the background.

Her presence, however slight in comparison to her prominent companions', asks new questions about Black Mountain's queer history and postwar American art more broadly. What did it mean to be a woman and a woman artist among all these queer men? How did working with clay, teaching, and writing history resolve or evoke the tensions of nascent sexual and political identities? How can we, to quote Butt, "bring about a *queer* turn in the writing of art history" that recognizes and accommodates more than just white men?⁴⁰

My intention here is to build on the work of Molesworth and Sorkin, who have crucially gestured towards the place of Richards and other women ceramists in queer and art history. The following analysis of Richards's unwritten Black Mountain book and its singing from the dusty archive as a radical queer progenitor is intended to tilt the scale—away from the oft-discussed gay men of Black Mountain and towards the queer existences and ideas that were fostered amongst craftswomen like Richards.

Richards approached the crafting of history in an anti-institutional manner. Her book would not sanctify Black Mountain College, but rather, open it up and show how it was the product of many separate and conflicting parts. In writing history in order to reconcile with a personal (and very present) struggle and seeing her lack of expertise as her greatest asset, Richards ascribed to a logic beyond the scope of mainstream academic and publishing institutions. The extent to which Richards resisted institutional standards is evidenced by the fact that she was consistently denied funding by major charitable foundations and chafed against her publishers' expectations.

Richards's nontraditional approach to writing history evokes Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Lives, Subcultural Lives*. This work explores how traditional notions of chronology and geography are disrupted in queer lives.

Halberstam defines queerness more broadly than specific sexual acts or identities, which is appropriate for a figure like Richards. Halberstam understands "queer uses of time and space" as emerging from practices that oppose "the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction [and] develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification."⁴¹

The book that Richards wanted to write eschewed many standards of historical writing. In her 1972 conversation with Harris, Richards described how her book would be integrated into her artistic practice and presided over by creative impulses.

It...would have been to evoke the sense of the place rather than to document it thoroughly....Because that's I think probably what I would been better at, to create something that would have given the mood and some information. But it would have been essentially a creative act for me.⁴²

By framing the book as "essentially a creative act," Richards imagined a mode of history writing that ran counter to the genre as it was professed by the academy and in publishing. In her view, creative expression and emotional resonance were not only essential to the documentation of the college's history, but would make up her book's foundation. Her portrait of the college would prioritize mood and feeling over the careful preservation of fact.

Her book would tell a fluid, material story of the college. In its faith to the realities of the college, it would be neither linear nor objective and would be integrated in its form and content. In 1966, she described the book as follows:

I...think of it as a kind of Autobiography of Black Mountain College, with original materials telling the story as much as possible. Black Mountain was a multiplicity of voices. It was the people who were there. There was no philosophical continuity. Everything was continually in question. It was a battlefield.⁴³

The personal perspective at the heart of Richards's history was not hers alone. Instead, the book was to be an "autobiography" of an entire community that would foreground "a multiplicity of voices." Richards would make no attempt to hide the controversies of the college and would exhibit, not conceal, contradictory perspectives. If Black Mountain was a battlefield, her book would be one too. Richards's attention to Black Mountain's multitudes brings to mind the queer theorist's orientation toward other logics of production and meaning-making, apart from and in opposition to hetero-patriarchal tradition.

In the following excerpt, Richards explained how she would manifest this creative approach to storytelling.

[The book would] be as interesting and varied as the place so that even the format... I saw it as...really creative...what interested me about it was to make a book that in itself would have the...sort of quality of the changes through which the school went. And whether it would be original material, or, say, there'd be a variation in page size, and there'd be a use of color and correspondence. And whether...like the selection of materials that would sort of tell the story. Of course, it would be my selection. It wouldn't have been like a history. It would have been probably more in a way more artistic. You know what I mean.⁴⁴

Richards did not imagine her book as a work of traditional history, but as an expressive portrait of a community. The multitudinous Black Mountain community would be palpable in the book's materiality to the same extent that it would be described in the text. Flipping through pages of different sizes, textures, and colors, readers would develop a sense of the college's personal, pedagogical, and aesthetic diversity. The various levels at which the college operated—in community and class meetings, in essays and letters, in paintings and textiles, in the natural and built environment—would be integrated into the book. In her faithfulness to the truth about Black Mountain, that it was multiple and conflicted and heavily emotional, Richards viewed her book as the expression of a democratic duty, a duty that was, in its essence, artistic and personal. In her refusal to silence Black Mountain's many voices, Richards redefined historical writing as akin to autobiography and, in the process, let the college's diversity sing out.

Richards's book was as much about the future as it was the past. Writing to John Andrew Rice, the founder of Black Mountain, in 1961, she explained "that the story of Black Mountain College contains meanings that can enliven the future of education...I am interested, again, not primarily in a rehash of the past; more in the meaning that time has ripened in that extraordinary experience. To make a New College: as New as that one was."⁴⁵ Richards saw her book as serving a social purpose; it would prevent the college from disappearing into obscurity and would provide a framework for the

development of more Black Mountains in the future. She wanted to derive important lessons from the college's history and offer them as fodder for "New College[s]."

The questions that Richards hoped to answer in her work included: "education for what? education, so what? what are the nature and destiny of man? what can he know? what must he learn? why? how? what is freedom? what is necessity? how does freedom rise out of necessity? what are the laws of life? how can a man acquire the capacities for growth, for love and for freedom?"⁴⁶ Using Black Mountain's history as a guiding framework, she would pursue philosophical inquiries about life itself. This approach is resonant with how Richards operated at the college. Even her most rote activities were underwritten by metaphysical questions; when she taught classes or participated in community debates, she was in pursuit of life's mysteries. The grief she felt at the college's demise stemmed partially from having lost an opportunity for radical discovery. The book reopened that opportunity.

Richards's forsaking of continuity in the book's structure, as well as her integration of the college's past, her present concerns, and the future of education (and her place within that future) puts her in conversation with another queer theorist: José Esteban Muñoz, whose 2009 *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* explores the role of the utopian imagination in queer thinking. Muñoz identifies queerness as "not yet here...an ideality...that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing."⁴⁷ He defines utopian feeling as a "methodology of hope" and suggests that it brings "a certain surplus...that promises a futurity, something that is not quite here."⁴⁸ In *Cruising Utopia*, he identifies this futurity in various historic queer existences and argues that it dwells in an anticipatory, imagined place, beyond the boundaries of the past, present, and future.

In her imaginative historicism, blurring of chronological boundaries, and personal attachment to Black Mountain, Richards inhabited a similar theoretical lineage to Muñoz. Her Black Mountain book was "not yet here" in that it focused on a severed past and a potential future. Her imaginative rendering of the past certainly would have given the book the surplus quality that Muñoz discusses. Furthermore, I see Richards in Muñoz's methodology, which he classifies "as a backward glance that enacts a future vision."⁴⁹ Richards's work was full of such expansive glances. Her investigation of a

foreclosed historical moment was laden with an open and invigorating passion for the future's potentialities. History was not confined to the exhaustive recording of facts and dates, rather, it involved a sweeping dive into the feeling of the past.

The book I have detailed in the preceding pages strikes me as entirely radical. Radical in the sense that Richards upended persistent and sanctified definitions (of books, of history, of Black Mountain College) and replaced them with new and expressive. Richards described to her friends, colleagues, and interviewers a massive book that embraced multiplicity in its form and content. The book would have forgone some of the most basic structures of bookmaking. It would have consisted of an array of different materials, done without chronological or thematic linearity, and been completely filtered through the perspectives of the college's community.

I imagine it would be possible to read Richards's book back to front, right to left, upside down. Maybe it would have had multiple editions and grown exponentially. Perhaps it would have been an exercise in collective writing and editing. But who knows? It was never made. In this failure, Richards again veers into the realm of the queer. As Halberstam writes in *The Queer Art of Failure*, "Failing is something queers do and have always done."⁵⁰

This failure is not all bad. According to Halberstam, "queer time" exists on a different scale and plane to straight temporality. Queer communities and individuals tend to eschew normative achievements such as marriage, conception, and the accumulation of wealth. Within this alternative system of valorization, perpetually erased bodies and experiences truly count.⁵¹ Richards's book was never written, but it is still a significant contribution to the college's legacy and a meaningful reflection on the craft of history. Indeed, through the lens of queer politics, much of Richards's life emerges from the shadows. The following declaration, made in *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person*, takes on a new meaning in the context of the aforementioned theorists. She writes,

I am a question-asker and a truth-seeker. I do not have much in the way of status in my life, nor security. I have been on quest, as it were: no ambition, no interest in tenure, always on the march, changing every seven years, from landscape to

landscape. Certain elements were constant: the poetry, the desire for relationship, the sense of voyage.⁵²

As Richards progressed on her voyage, she continued to engage with Black Mountain history, even as her book project became further impinged upon by her publishers and editors. Just as Richards's very personal approach to writing history derailed her effort to secure interviews with the Dreiers and the Alberses, her queer methodology proved to be an issue with her publishers, who wanted her to produce a far more *straight-forward* book. Though her queer historicism would now be understood as an authentic and analytically fruitful take on Black Mountain, in the 1960s it was seen as threatening and illegible.

"[I] felt myself turning"

In a letter from 1966, Richards detailed her struggle to mediate the expectations of the publishers interested in the project. After several years of going back and forth in deals with publishing companies, "the Black Mountain Project...[came] forward to offer itself."⁵³ However, even with the proper resources and funding in place, Richards was not interested in pursuing the book. She explains that "as late as the middle of February, 1964, I had everything arranged to buy a car and drive to Raleigh to start work on the Black Mountain archives. Suddenly, the day I was to start, I was immobilized and felt myself turning."⁵⁴ Richards's sudden ambivalence about the project left her physically unable to develop it further.

She wrote that this was due in part to the publication of *Centering* in 1964. *Centering* not only gave her a vehicle to discuss her philosophy about life and education, but also helped her consider her interests in a broader context than Black Mountain. She wrote, "I have discovered that there are steps to be taken in life which we did not take at [Black Mountain]."⁵⁵ Having expressed her ideas in a book as diverse as *Centering*, which contains chapters on poetry, pedagogy, and pottery, the book that her publishers wanted seemed very narrow in scope.

She continued:

At Harper and Row I was suddenly aware that Black Mountain College (whatever that was) was in danger of being formulated as an institution and sold to the public — a fate it had scrupulously avoided during its lifetime. What was I doing there?⁵⁶

Richards was interested in writing the book for the same reasons she was drawn to Black Mountain. The college's lack of traditional structures meant that it offered her, as a teacher and a writer, the opportunity to work freely and experimentally. More than twenty years after she first arrived there, she could still refer to it as "Black Mountain College (whatever that was)"—the college's inimitability remained the source of its appeal. The idea that almost a decade after the college closed she was to "[formulate it] as an institution" was anathema to her.

While she was dreaming up a multidimensional, collaged autobiography of the college, the editors, publishers, and charitable foundations with whom she collaborated,

didn't want a Black Mountain...a picture of Black Mountain. They wanted to promote something that could be applied at the present time as a model, you know, to make...like, if Black Mountain was good, a lot of 'em would be better, so let's have another or more...they wanted a kind of model developed.⁵⁷

Even though Richards saw in Black Mountain an ideal formula for cultivating academic freedom, forming relationships, and living a rich life, she was not willing to sacrifice her creative vision in order to produce some kind of "Black Mountain for Dummies." She was concerned with the future of education, but was interested in answering such expansive questions as "education for what? education, so what? what are the nature and destiny of man?" Even if it was possible to craft a Black Mountain "model" that could be marketed, sold, and reproduced endlessly, it was a task that stood in opposition to her creative approach. (Consider briefly what a philosophical, autobiographical, and experimental pottery how-to *Centering* is...).

Some of the hostility that Richards faced came from her friends. In *Black Mountain*, Duberman describes how James Leo Herlihy, one of Richards's Black

Mountain students and the author of *Midnight Cowboy*, arranged for Duberman and Richards to meet for the first time.

Jim had arranged the evening with M.C. as a way of encouraging me to go ahead with the project...Jim knew that Mary Caroline was an enchanting human being...and that meeting her was bound to increase my zest for writing the book. He also knew that M.C., like Wallen, was a visionary; that she'd never gotten over her own excitement at Black Mountain's possibilities, and that in some moods might overemphasize what was good about the place, letting her initial expectations get confused with, even supplant, the disappointment she (like Wallen) eventually felt with Black Mountain's actuality. And so when M.C. had finished telling me about teaching at Black Mountain being 'relevant to the life lines of the people involved,' Jim, an honorable man who didn't want my interest in the place falsely encouraged, stepped into the conversation with a gentle corrective. M.C., he said, is talking about how wonderful it might have been...But in fact, he added, 'I don't think the teachers at Black Mountain did feel that way—except M.C...' ⁵⁸

I see in this excerpt yet another example of Richards's radical historicism being misunderstood and dismissed. Herlihy introduced his friends in the hope that Richards could convince Duberman to write a Black Mountain history. Their meeting was indeed fruitful. Richards, the "enchanting human being" and "visionary," charmed Duberman with her Black Mountain stories. Once she had successfully piqued his interest, however, Herlihy, the "honorable man," intervened so as to protect Duberman from Richards's apparent tendency to exaggerate. In the estimation of Herlihy and Duberman, Richards's perspective on Black Mountain was inaccurate and outside the purview of the "real" historian.

I believe that Richards clashed with her supporters on two levels. At first glance, this was a methodological, historiographic conflict. Richards was idiosyncratic in what she considered to be appropriate to include, or exclude, in a historical study. As a writer and thinker, Richards gravitated towards intuitive and creative forms of knowledge. Though she spent years ensconced in the academy as an undergraduate, a doctorate

student, and a professor of English, she was a profound and unconventional thinker, so much so that the Dominican priest Matthew Fox, a friend and supporter, often compared her to Jesus Christ.⁵⁹ Richards eschewed messianic comparisons and put it thusly: "I am an odd bird in both academic and craft worlds."⁶⁰ It comes as no surprise that this odd bird found herself at loggerheads with her institutionalist colleagues.

In another light, this was a debate about Black Mountain's very legacy. Richards's book, with its multiple, conflicting viewpoints and prioritization of the felt over the factual, would have painted a controversial portrait of Black Mountain College. Rather than sanctify the college, Richards sought to tear it open. Her book would have been part-ode, part-exposé. *Richards's* truth—that Black Mountain was an inspiring yet fractious "battlefield" that left her and others emotionally wrecked and creatively stifled—would have been primary to the story she told. Her book's thesis was undoubtedly tied to an unfortunate aspect of Richards's post-Black Mountain life, which is that, having taken the collapse of the college very personally, she was unable to teach or write "anything of [her] own for several years."⁶¹ Though subsequent Black Mountain scholars have been open about the college's problems, Richards, and her book that "wouldn't have been like a history," struck a distressing chord.⁶² When her former colleagues refused her interview requests and her publishers attempted to quash her adventurous historicism, they made clear their disinterest in (or fear of) what her book would do to the college.

Despite its bumpy and ultimately unfulfilled journey towards publication, Richards's book now looks at home in the Black Mountain canon and shares many similarities with other major histories. This is not to say that the controversy Richards's book stoked was unwarranted. Indeed, the historicist practice that she maintained outside of the context of the book—in the very fiber of her life as a teacher, poet, and craftsperson—attests to her radical and unique interpretation of the college.

"Black Mountain versus black mountain"

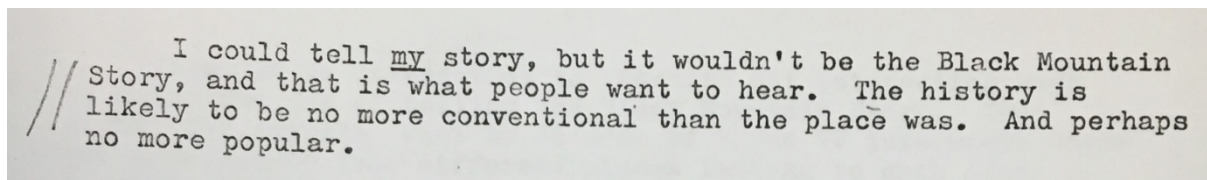
Like other Black Mountain devotees, Richards believed that the spirit that illuminated the college was one of a kind, but she also understood that it was transferrable and could be made manifest widely. In this way, she did not stop being a

historian of the college when she decided not to write her book. Instead, the passion for Black Mountain that fueled her book sprouted an abundance of opportunities to consider, analyze, and celebrate the college in her life.

After putting aside the book, Richards came to the following conclusion:

I could tell my story, but it wouldn't be the Black Mountain Story, and that is what people want to hear. The history is likely to be more conventional than the place was.⁶³

In this disclosure, Richards draws a line between her story and the college's. Couched in this differentiation is her belief that Black Mountain would be historicized differently than it had been experienced. In life, the college was experimental, but as a "history," it was "likely to be more conventional." Her recognition of this fact demonstrates her expanding view of herself as a historian and of Black Mountain as a historical and personal influence. Of special note in this passage is her orthographic rendering of "Black Mountain Story," which is pictured below.



I could tell my story, but it wouldn't be the Black Mountain Story, and that is what people want to hear. The history is likely to be no more conventional than the place was. And perhaps no more popular.

Figure 3. M.C. Richards, typed excerpt from a letter to Howard Adams, June 18, 1966. Courtesy of the Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.

In a different passage from the same 1966 letter, Richards offers another musing on the college. She shifts her focus from the spectre of her forsaken book to her ongoing philosophical engagement with the college. Richards visualizes Black Mountain's transformation—from a particular place and topic of historical inquiry to a roving source of inspiration—in her presentation of its name. Below, Black Mountain Story becomes "black mountain." She writes,

Certain people seem to seek a "black mountain" at a certain time in their lives. It is a time when you leave the supports of the known, and ask yourself what you want to do, what you want to learn or to teach: what indeed is worthwhile. It is a

time when there is no promise of external reward, nor any power structure to blame for what is or is not happening — no outside power, that is. Just you and your peers. No parents. No president. No director. No system.⁶⁴

A photograph of a typed excerpt from a letter, showing the text: "Certain people seem to seek a "black mountain" at a certain time in their lives. It is a time when you leave the supports of the known, and ask yourself what you want to do, what you want to learn or to teach: what indeed is worthwhile. It is a time when there is no promise of external reward, nor any power structure to blame for what is or is not happening -- no outside power, that is. Just you and your peers. No parents. No president. No director. No system. And naturally therefore it is a time..."

Figure 4. M.C. Richards, typed excerpt from a letter to Howard Adams, June 18, 1966. Courtesy of the Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.

Though it might seem like a subtle grammatical difference or perhaps even a typo, these two different renderings of the college's name—Black Mountain Story and "black mountain"—speak volumes about how Richards moved on from the loss of both the college and her book. In *Black Mountain Story*, "story" is capitalized into a proper noun, adding a gravity and seriousness to the telling of the college's history. This *Black Mountain Story* cannot be taken lightly or told creatively. This is the conservative and commercially viable version of the college's history that Richards was unable to write.

By contrast, "black mountain," with its casual lower-case letters and dubious quotation marks, looks more like some radical remnant or distant cousin of the college. The phrase represented for Richards all that was lost in the *Black Mountain Story*: the college's fluidity and freedom, its generative and creative spirit, its rejection of traditional boundaries and hierarchies. In searching for these values, she dissociated the college's name from its physical place, historical moment, and actual community.

Beginning with the "seed" of Black Mountain College, Richards both addressed a fundamental human problem—that of feeling constrained by one's circumstances—and pointed toward its solution: the embrace and practice of "black mountain," a quasi-anarchic philosophy that prioritizes freedom from hegemony and the embrace of creativity.⁶⁵ To conjure a black mountain requires neither attendance at the historical college nor any real institutional structures, such as a campus or a faculty. All that is necessary is the acceptance of one's own will. From there, existing power structures

(parents, presidents, directors, systems) will surely disintegrate, or, at least, be of less import, thereby leaving room for one's own creative spirit to emerge.

Richards's intensifying belief in black mountain over Black Mountain is apparent in her writing and thinking from the decade after the college closed. Her letters from this period, preserved in the archive, testify to the effort she made to summon black mountain in her life.

After leaving the college, Richards made her way to Stony Point, New York, and founded the Gate Hill Cooperative with several other Black Mountain associates. She imagined that Gate Hill could become, as Jenni Sorkin put it, a "weekend Black Mountain" for her extended community.⁶⁶ It would have no traditional collegiate structures, but would offer local and far-flung friends the opportunity to spend time in a rural setting and share their work with a group. In a letter from 1960, she described her vision for Gate Hill as follows:

We have thought for some time about the possibility of a kind of community center, where workshops, lectures, movies, musical programs, etc., could be given, to serve the local community... We have also thought of summer music programs, and theater...As you may know, most of us came together originally at an educational community, a college, in North Carolina: Black Mountain College.⁶⁷

Richards's enthusiasm for this integrated living and creative center was not always reciprocated by her peers. Karnes and David Weinrib were busy working in their production pottery and raising their children. Cage, Tudor, and Cunningham were traveling the world, performing their scores and choreography. Unable to channel the college's spirit in a communal form, Richards pioneered ways to practice "black mountain" on her own.

The classroom became a site for putting Black Mountain values into practice. As a professor at City College of New York, Richards experimented with her pedagogical approach both to challenge herself and to bring the advantages of Black Mountain to her students. In a 1958 letter, she wrote: "I have discovered that it is possible to do what I want at City College just as freely as it ever was at Black Mountain, and since that

discovery I have been having a ball."⁶⁸ Despite the vast difference between Black Mountain and City College—one was rural, the other urban, one was unaccredited, the other was ensconced in various governmental and academic systems—Richards was emboldened to be herself as a teacher in both institutions. Black Mountain gave her the space and time to be an experimental and generous teacher, but it did not confine those lessons to a particular campus or curriculum. Rather, Richards left North Carolina with the capacity to offer a diverse array of students their very own "black mountain."

She also saw traces of Black Mountain in the unfolding of current events. In a 1969 letter to Duberman, she considered how the student protests sweeping universities across the world evoked the college's past.

I've been watching the television reports for 2 or 3 weeks now, covering the student rebellions on various campuses, teacher strikes, etc. And tonight after watching the confrontation on the San Francisco State campus and the arrest of 400 marchers, & seeing the fire damage to Wheeler Hall on the Berkeley Campus, somehow I just feel like writing to you...I was thinking tonight how interesting it is that the questions these people are asking now about the academic establishment, I asked more than 20 years ago. I left the University of Chicago for Black Mountain College. To search out other values: autonomy, freedom from status symbols, real life situational learning, personal contact, self determination, interracial equality, all the stuff the rebels are hollering for today. We had it all down there in North Carolina. And it wasn't enough. Our freedom wasn't enough...As you know, this was the ultimate reason that I decided not to do the Black Mountain book. I decided that I was more interested in asking the next question than in documenting that particular step on the way. The next question, what is it? How come if we're so smart and so free, we're still battling each other so furiously? How do we live fruitfully with our freedom and our autonomy? How do we disarm the power principle within the human being? If autonomy isn't enough, what is needed besides? How do we establish living relationships between free differences? How do we communicate past the barriers of language? or languages?⁶⁹

The profundity of this excerpt stems partially from Richards's anticipation of yet another major theme of Black Mountain literature. The relationship between Black Mountain and the student rebellions of the 1960s has long been a touchstone of the literature.⁷⁰ Unlike other historians of the college, Richards made this comparison without the benefit of any critical distance. Sitting in front of the television at her brother's home in Santa Cruz, she saw a place for herself, as well as the college, in the span of history.

This is the essence of Richards as a Black Mountain historian. Her voice in this letter is both personal and insightful. Her desire to reconcile the questions of the future with the realities of the past is earnest and felt. Watching television or sending a letter (or working with clay, a student, or on a biodynamic farm), Richards was a Black Mountain historian. The college was deeply woven into Richards's view of the world and she saw it almost everywhere she turned. In turn, the college pressed Richards to ask complex questions about herself, her values, and the world she helped to form.

Nearly a decade earlier, upon her return from a vacation, Richards wrote to a friend that she had had an epiphany:

It came to me in a dream in Mexico that the spirit I loved so much at Black Mountain College could live wherever I was, and I had only to bring it to expression. I had grieved so much for the loss of that place, and suddenly I realized that it need not be lost at all—that, on the contrary, it must be continuously re-created.⁷¹

Thousands of miles from the Blue Ridge Mountains, Richards brought Black Mountain back to life. By reframing the college as a spirit that she could invoke on her own wherever she was, Richards rewrote the college's history. Black Mountain College did not disintegrate because of personal conflicts and financial crises, but continued to flourish in the hearts and minds of its extended community. The key to its survival no longer lay in waging battles on the faculty or revising the curriculum, but in bringing a particular spirit into expression. Though Black Mountain was in 1958—and remains today—undeniably out of reach, Richards demonstrated that by asking big questions, embracing vulnerability, and engaging with history creatively, she could make and remake the college again, for herself and others. The version of the college that she

attempted to write about, and that she lived and breathed with for decades, was one that she struggled to contain to a history book, but that could be brought "to expression" widely and with passion.

As we work to recover this aspect of Richards's legacy, we must consider how her methodology rewrites our values as historians. In her decades-long investment in Black Mountain's history, she consistently foregrounded aspects of the community that might, to another historian, appear unrecoverable. Her capacity for this task was due in part to her dual status as a historical actor and a historian. But more broadly, her lifelong commitment to holism meant that she could not think about Black Mountain as a site of aesthetic and pedagogical innovation without also thinking about Black Mountain as a contested terrain of conflicting and diverse personalities, expectations, and dreams. For Richards, there was no Black Mountain without black mountain—to write and to experience history was to take seriously the imagined and felt.

¹ Roy Kuhlman designed dozens of Abstract Expressionism-inspired book covers for Grove Press during the 1950s-1960s, including Antonin Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double*, translated by M.C. Richards in 1958, and *Essays in Zen Buddhism: First Series*, by D.T. Suzuki, from 1961—two Cage favorites.

² "Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community," *Royal Books*, accessed November 17, 2018, <https://www.royalbooks.com/pages/books/141184/martin-duberman/black-mountain-an-exploration-in-community-first-edition-signed-by-john-cage>.

³ Jenni Sorkin, *Live Form: Women, Ceramics, Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 170.

⁴ Daniel Rhodes, review of *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person*, by M.C. Richards, *Craft Horizons*, January/February 1965, 51-52.

⁵ Amazon. "Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person," amazon.com, accessed May 4, 2018, https://www.amazon.com/Centering-Pottery-Poetry-Caroline-Richards/dp/0819562009/ref=sr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1522020754&sr=8-2&keywords=centering

⁶ Google Books. "Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person," google.books.com, accessed May 4, 2018, https://books.google.com/books/about/Centering_in_Pottery_Poetry_and_the_Pers.html?id=69DenzbyEdQC.

⁷ Karen Shirley to MC Richards, February 20, 1968, Series IV: Workshops, lectures and exhibitions, 1944-2005, Box 44, Folder 2, Mary Caroline Richards Papers.

⁸ Richards, M.C.. "Chapter Two: Centering as Transformation." In *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person*.

⁹ Helen Molesworth, "Imaginary Landscapes," in *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933-1957*, ed. Helen Molesworth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 73.

¹⁰ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, xiii.

¹¹ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 102-113.

¹² Duberman, *Black Mountain*, xvii.

¹³ M.C. Richards, interview by Mary Emma Harris, November 13, 1972, 61.12, North Carolina Museum of Art, Black Mountain College Research Project.

¹⁴ M.C. Richards to Rex Arragon, January 18, 1961, Series I: Black Mountain College and its critical reception, 1945-1999, Box 2, Folder 2, Richards Papers.

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- ¹⁵ M.C. Richards to Josef and Anni Albers, September 6, 1961, Series I: Black Mountain College and its critical reception, 1945-1999, Box 2, Folder 3, Richards Papers.
- ¹⁶ M.C. Richards to Rex Arragon, January 18, 1961, Series I: Black Mountain College and its critical reception, 1945-1999, Box 2, Folder 2, Richards Papers.
- ¹⁷ Helen Molesworth, "Imaginary Landscapes," in *Leap Before You Look: Black Mountain College, 1933-1957*, ed. Helen Molesworth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 73.
- Duberman, *Black Mountain*, xvii-xviii.
- ¹⁸ Theodore Dreier to Mary Caroline Richards, September 12, 1961, Series I: Black Mountain College and its critical reception, 1945-1999, Box 2, Folder 3, Richards Papers.
- ¹⁹ Anni Albers to Mary Caroline Richards, September 26, 1961, Series I: Black Mountain College and its critical reception, 1945-1999, Box 2, Folder 3, Richards Papers.
- ²⁰ Theodore Dreier to Mary Caroline Richards, September 12, 1961, Series I: Black Mountain College and its critical reception, 1945-1999, Box 2, Folder 3, Richards Papers.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² Sorkin, *Live Form*, 170.
- ²³ Ibid., 171-2.
- ²⁴ Richards, *Centering*, 10.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 150.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 150.
- ²⁷ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 258-271.
- ²⁸ Jason Ezell, "Martin Duberman's Queer Historiography and Pedagogy," *Black Mountain College Studies*, Volume 1 (Spring 2011).
- ²⁹ Jason Ezell, "Martin Duberman's Queer Historiography and Pedagogy," *Black Mountain College Studies*, Volume 1 (Spring 2011).
- ³⁰ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 348.
- ³¹ Helen Molesworth, "Imaginary Landscapes," in *Leap Before You Look*, 73.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Helen Molesworth, "Imaginary Landscapes," in *Leap Before You Look*, 73.
- ³⁴ Helen Molesworth, "Imaginary Landscapes," in *Leap Before You Look*, 73.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Irit Rogoff, "Gossip as Testimony: A postmodern signature," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2003): 269.
- Gavin Butt, *Between You and Me: Queer Disclosures in the New York Art World, 1948-1963* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 12.
- ³⁷ Butt, *Between You and Me*, 15-16.
- ³⁸ Jonathan Katz, "John Cage's Queer Silence; or, How to Avoid Making Matters Worse." *GLQ* 2, no. 5 (1999): 231.
- ³⁹ Katz, "John Cage's Queer Silence; or, How to Avoid Making Matters Worse," 238.
- ⁴⁰ Butt, *Between You and Me*, 8.
- ⁴¹ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Lives, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005): 1.
- ⁴² M.C. Richards, interview by Mary Emma Harris, November 13, 1972, 61.12, North Carolina Museum of Art, Black Mountain College Research Project.
- ⁴³ M.C. Richards to Howard Adams, June 18, 1966, Duberman Papers.
- ⁴⁴ M.C. Richards, interview by Mary Emma Harris, November 13, 1972, 61.12, North Carolina Museum of Art, Black Mountain College Research Project.
- ⁴⁵ Letter to John Andrew Rice, September 6, 1961 from Series I, Box 2, Folder 3, Mary Caroline Richards papers, 1898-1999, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 960036.
- ⁴⁶ Letter to Rex Arragon, January 18, 1961, Mary Caroline Richards papers, 1898-2007, bulk 1942-1999, Box 2, Folder 2, The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles, Accession no. 960036.
- ⁴⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.
- ⁴⁸ Ibid., 5-7.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.
- ⁵⁰ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

⁵¹ Ibid., 4.

⁵² Richards, *Centering*, 13-14.

⁵³ M.C. Richards to Howard Adams, June 18, 1966, PC.1678.1, Folder 35, Duberman Papers.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ M.C. Richards to Howard Adams, June 18, 1966, Duberman Papers.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ M.C. Richards, interview by Mary Emma Harris, November 13, 1972, 61.12, North Carolina Museum of Art, Black Mountain College Research Project.

⁵⁸ Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 308.

⁵⁹ Matthew Fox, "Foreword to the Second Edition," in *Centering*, ix and x.

⁶⁰ Richards, *Centering*, 7.

⁶¹ M.C. Richards to Howard Adams, June 18, 1966, PC.1678.1, Folder 35, Duberman Papers.

⁶² M.C. Richards, interview by Mary Emma Harris, November 13, 1972, 61.12, North Carolina Museum of Art, Black Mountain College Research Project.

⁶³ M.C. Richards to Howard Adams, June 18, 1966, Duberman Papers.

⁶⁴ M.C. Richards to Howard Adams, June 18, 1966, Duberman Papers.

⁶⁵ Richards often referred to Black Mountain as a "golden seed":

M.C. Richards essay, "Black Mountain College: A Golden Seed" published in *Craft Horizons*, date unknown, Series I: Black Mountain College and its critical reception, 1945-1999, Box 84, Folder 8, Richards Papers.

Mervin Lane edited a book called *Black Mountain College: Sprouted Seeds: An Anthology of Personal Accounts* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992) which also pursues this notion of BMC as a "seed."

⁶⁶ Sorkin, *Live Form*, 182.

⁶⁷ M.C. Richards to Conrad Lynn, October 27, 1960, Series II: Correspondence, 1904-2007, Box 3, Folder 5, Richards Papers.

⁶⁸ M.C. Richards to Unknown, 1958, Series II: Correspondence, 1904-2007, Box 3, Folder 3, Richards papers.

⁶⁹ M.C. Richards to Martin Duberman, January 23, 1969. Martin Duberman Papers. Western Regional Archives. Correspondence. Folder 35. PC1678.

⁷⁰ See Duberman's reflections on John Wallen and Princeton: Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 268.

See Harris in *The Arts at Black Mountain*: "the college anticipated many of the challenges to the university in the 1960s, such as the involvement of students and faculty in the administrative and decision-making process, the pass/fail system, and more flexible curriculum." (Mary Emma Harris, *The Arts at Black Mountain* (Boston: MIT Press, 1987), 245).

⁷¹ Mary Caroline Richards to Sari Dienes, 1958, Series I: Black Mountain College and its critical reception, 1945-1999, Box 3, Folder 3, Richards Papers.

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