

WIDE AWAKE: AESTHETIC EDUCATION
AT BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

It was the early hours of the morning west of the little sleeping town of Black Mountain (“altitude 2,400 feet” read the road marker) nestled in the Swannanoa Valley, when we spotted the hand-painted BLACK MOUNTAIN COLLEGE sign with its directional arrow along a country road.

—Michael Rumaker²

THE ROAD TO BLACK MOUNTAIN

Let’s try a thought experiment. Imagine a place where general education is more than a slogan, a college built from the ground up to foster the development of the whole person. Here, faculty are recruited not to fill departmental slots but to exemplify the quest for dynamic, integrated personhood. Students are greeted with the expectation that this is a place to confront and cultivate oneself. The faculty and students do not see themselves as the employees and clients of a going concern: they are the college, a self-governing community of experienced and novice learners. The ethos here is experimental. The community has come together to learn from, rather than act out, the stubborn educational antinomies between work and play, compulsion and license, the social and the individual, the academic and the existential. To clear space for this new venture, these poets of the pedagogical overturn many of the basic constraints built into the grammar of higher education, asking, for example, What if interdisciplinarity were a starting point rather than a later bridging? How can we reunite the arts and the liberal arts? How would the culture shift if faculty attended each other’s classes? What if requirements and grades were replaced with careful individual advisement and culminating exams? What happens when you reject the distinction between the curricular and the extracurricular? The result is an (extra)curriculum that nurtures the connections between head

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Undeclared

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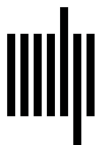
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