TIBETAN BUDDHISTS, POETRY WARS AND THE NAROPA INSTITUTE IN THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BOULDER, COLORADO

By

Ross R. Webster

B.A., University of Colorado Boulder, 2005

A thesis submitted to the University of Colorado, Denver

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts Public History

2012

This thesis for the Master of Arts

degree by

Ross R. Webster

has been approved

by

Thomas J. Noel

Christopher Agee

Alison Shah

_____

Date

Ross R. Webster(Master of Arts, Public History)

Tibetan Buddhists, Poetry Wars and the Naropa Institute in the People's Republic of Boulder, Colorado

Thesis directed by Professor Thomas J. Noel and Assistant Professor Christopher Agee

ABSTRACT

The city of Boulder, Colorado became an ideal location for the foundation of Naropa Institute, the first Buddhist-inspired academic university in the United States. This thesis follows the formative years of the Naropa Institute, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, a period following two tumultuous decades of social change in America. The paper examines how this uniquely unorthodox enterprise grew popular by providing a curriculum that addressed the spiritual and educational needs of a changing society and how, despite significant societal and financial challenges, Naropa became an accredited university as well as an honored institution in the Boulder community. This thesis also aims to frame its founder, the exiled Tibetan lama, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche; its co-founders, esteemed Beat poets Alan Ginsberg and Anne Waldman; and other affiliates in the context of the rise of new religious movements in the postwar United States. From their initial embrace by the counter-culture to societal backlash against them in the wake of the Jonestown

mass suicide, they are an important factor in the history of Naropa. Indeed, it remains as a tangible legacy of these movements.

This broad historical overview makes it apparent that nothing about the creation of a Buddhist university headed by Beat poets and an exiled Tibetan was seamless, even in the new liberal, free-lifestyle bastion of Boulder. First and foremost, the Naropa staff decided to manage its curriculum and budgetary needs in order to gain accreditation and respectability among the American higher education establishment. Trungpa and the Naropa community also had to adapt and become attractive to the new socio-political climate of Boulder dominated by middle-class “lifestyle" liberals rather than its original counter-culture constituency rooted in the Beat Generation and hippie social movements. Also of importance was the need to defend Naropa’s legitimacy in the face of its founder’s eccentric, even scandalous, behavior to avoid the label of a cult. Through perseverance, cultural malleability and community outreach, Chogyam Trungpa, Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman and Naropa faculty and students were able to endure fiscal pressure and historical circumstance to make Naropa University a lasting presence in the city of Boulder.

This abstract accurately represents the content of the candidate's thesis. I recommend its publication

Approved: Thomas J. Noel

Approved: Christopher Agee

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to many people for their help and guidance in writing and plotting the course of this thesis. First on the list are the members of my committee, Thomas J. Noel, Christopher Agee and Alison Shah, chair, co-chair and reader, respectively. They were valuable in guiding me to locations and references for gathering information as well as stylistic guidance in how to craft the narrative of my thesis. I also appreciate the efforts of Jill Hutchison, Graduate Coordinator, for assistance in coordinating the necessary arrangements for completing my thesis.

Thanks also goes to Mark Villey, Nicholas Weiss and April Henson who are, respectively, directors and library service coordinator of Naropa's Allen Ginsberg Library and its impressive archives. Their assistance and patience was very valuable to me in my pursuit of information and materials.

I am especially grateful to Anne Waldman, poet, Naropa co-founder and a national treasure, for her time and willingness to provide me with input and insight when I interviewed her in 2010. Thanks goes to Corey Drayton, my dear friend and fellow University of Colorado, Boulder alumni, for getting me in touch with Anne Waldman.

Finally and most importantly, I want to thank my parents, Jean and David Webster and my brother, Scott Webster, for their endless support, suggestions and editing skills.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"*It's impossible to fall off mountains you fool*"
From the *Dharma Bums* by Jack Kerouac

Six years after the death of the Beat Generation icon, Jack Kerouac, an experiment in higher education and spiritual awakening was underway on the front range of the Colorado Rockies. Allen Ginsberg, the venerated beat poet and close friend of Jack Kerouac, along with fellow poet, Anne Waldman, created the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics. The poetry school was one of the seminal components of the newly-formed ambitious Naropa Institute. Co-founded in 1974 with Ginsberg and Waldman, the Naropa Institute was the brainchild of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, an exiled Tibetan lama, customarily referred to as The Rinpoche. As the writer of *The Dharma Bums,* Kerouac was an ideal choice for Naropa's new poetry school. Based on Kerouac's own mountaineering sojourns on Matterhorn Peak in the Sierra Nevadas and Desolation Peak in the Washington State Cascades, *The Dharma Bums* follows the spiritual journey of his literary stand-in, Ray Smith, and Japhy Ryder (whose character is based on Beat poet Gary Snyder) as they seek the essence of Zen Buddhism in America. Like his most famous book, *On the Road* and Ginsberg's epic poem, *Howl,* The *Dharma Bums* reflected the discontentment that a growing number of

Americans felt with Postwar American society. These Americans were discontented with mainstream values emphasizing conformity, material acquisition, active and institutional racism and restrictive sexual and social mores. The seeds of discontent took root and spread, culminating in the social movements of the tumultuous 1960s.

The Rinpoche's vision was a sort of academic kitchen where the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism could be shed of their exotic and alien Eastern trappings to make them more palatable for Westerners craving spiritual nourishment. However, the path to academic recognition and social respectability was not an easy one for this unorthodox, religious-based center of learning. As will be explained in this thesis, the Naropa Institute spent much of its first two decades struggling to keep afloat financially while building its reputation as a place of legitimate higher education. Given the counter-culture nature of its poetic founders and, especially, the well-publicized eccentric, even scandalous, behavior of the Rinpoche, many believed that Naropa was a cult. Despite the challenges during its formative years, the Naropa Institute survived well into the twenty-first century and became the first accredited Buddhist inspired, nonsectarian university in the United States.

Purpose of Study

This thesis ultimately aims to uncover the mechanisms of Naropa's survival, success and esteem in Boulder and nationwide. A number of questions informed the course of this thesis. How is the history of Naropa Institute comparable to the overall history of the emergence of alternative religious movements in the postwar United States? Is the founder of Naropa, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche comparable with other contemporary Asian spiritual figures and charismatic cult leaders? What was the contribution of Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman and the Beat Generation to shaping Naropa's character? Was there something unique about the culture or politics of the city of Boulder, Colorado that allowed Naropa to survive and flourish? Did regional cultural conformity and nationwide academic conformity ultimately save Naropa from an uncertain future? These questions hint at the uniqueness of this thesis in that it is a cultural history as well as an institutional history examining national trends within a specific region of the postwar American West.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on a fourteen-year period between 1974 and 1987. The year 1974 marks the official founding of the Naropa Institute, while 1987 marks the death of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, which occurred a year after Naropa achieved full accreditation. Within these fourteen years, Naropa

faced its most serious set of crises, which were primarily financial. The exception was a series of the events that became known as the Poetry Wars which essentially was a scandal that threatened the reputation and credibility of Naropa. Framing the early history of Naropa Institute in this timeline also correlates with the political and cultural rise of the lifestyle liberals, that is to say liberals adhering to sixties ideals while pursuing civic improvement or commercial enterprise in Boulder. This timeline also correlates with the nationwide demise of New Left liberalism in as well as the backlash against alternative religious movements sparked by the Jonestown mass-suicide in 1978. The period from 1984 to 1987 also marks an important transition point in Naropa's formative years. This is the period after Chogyam Trungpa departed Boulder, Colorado and moved the headquarters of Naropa's parent organization, the Vajradhatu Corporation to Nova Scotia, Canada. Trungpa's departure lead to a critical new status of independence for the developing institution.

To a lesser extent, the scope of this study includes the postwar history of new religions in the United States starting with the Beat Generation and Zen Buddhism in the 1950s.The study devotes more attention to the late 1960s when the collapse of the sixties social revolutions sends disenfranchised radicals flocking to new religious movements.

Limitations of Study

This study was fortunate to be informed by a diverse number of sources including newspaper reports, newsletters, symposiums, personal journal accounts, accreditation reports, meeting minutes, personal correspondence letters and interviews. Many of these sources such as the accreditation reports and meeting minutes were accessed at the exceptionally well-managed archives of Naropa University's Allen Ginsberg Library and Naropa University's Nalanda Campus. Other original sources were gathered at the Denver Public Library and Boulder's Carnegie Library specializing in local history. For reasons unknown, these institutions held few if any articles from local Boulder publications such as the *Boulder Daily Camera* pertaining to Naropa related news. Attempts to contact the *Daily Camera* by email or phone yielded no results. Time restrictions also limited any in-depth examination of the relationship between the Naropa Institute and the University of Colorado, Boulder. This and other topics are open to examination in future editions.

Arrangement of the Thesis

Chapter One, "'This is the Place': From Tibet to the Rockies," follows Naropa's founder Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche from his exile and spiritual reinvention in Great Britain to his arrival and cultivation of followers and allies in the United States. Chapter Two, "Liberal Politics, Lifestyles and Education

in Boulder," examines the impact of environmentalism and lifestyle capitalism on Boulder politics from the turn of the twentieth century to the postwar era. Chapter Two also examines the Naropa Institute's relationship to the clash between academic institutions and religious interests both conservatives and liberals. Chapter Three," 'Crazy Wisdom': Naropa Struggles While Artists Assemble," explains how Naropa's sudden popularity brought an unexpected influx of students and financial struggles that challenged some the lofty ideals of the Naropa Institute. This chapter also examines Naropa's appeal to prominent Beat Generation poets, artists and musicians. Chapter Four, "Naropa Adjusts as Boulder Changes," explains the relationship between Boulder and the Naropa Institute as liberal Boulderites reject counter-culture lifestyles and grow weary of alternative religious organizations. Chapter Five, "'Less Crazy, More Wisdom,' Naropa's Quest for Accreditation and A Legacy," explains how the staff of the Naropa Institute gradually formed into a competent and professional academic administrative body and how it gained community support in Boulder. This thesis concludes with Naropa in the twenty-first century as its staff struggles to balance its institutionalization with its core, idealistic mission.

CHAPTER 1

"THIS IS THE PLACE": FROM TIBET TO THE ROCKIES

Although the founder of the Naropa Institute, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, completed intense spiritual training for his vocation in Tibet, his real education began in the West. Trungpa arrived in England in 1963. He was one of many refugee lamas escaping Tibet in the wake of the Chinese Communist takeover. Had his life in Tibet gone uninterrupted, Trungpa would have become the eleventh incarnation of a lineage of lamas known as the *Trungpa Tulkus*. For generations the Tulkus acted as abbots to the Surmang monasteries which dotted the landscape of Eastern Tibet. In becoming supreme abbot of Surmang, Trungpa would have ruled as governor of the Kham region.[1] Deprived of their kingdom and faced with uncertainty as to how long Tibet would remain under Chinese rule, the lamas who received asylum in India and, later, the West had to adjust their spiritual careers in a modernized society where they had no established authority.

Trungpa's arrival in the West correlated with a surge of interest in Eastern religious and spiritual practices among students and academics though often only superficially as Trungpa soon realized. After completing his studies in comparative religion at Oxford University, Trungpa, along with a

[1] Chogyam Trungpa, *Born in Tibet,* New York: Brace & World Inc., 1968, 54-55.

fellow *tulku disciple* Akong Rinpoche, established the first Tibetan Buddhist meditation center to be located in the West. Situated in the Lowlands of Scotland, Kagyu Samye Ling Monastery prospered after its foundation, drawing in other monks, nuns, and traditional Tibetan artists and craftsmen. In later years, Samye Ling gained popularity from its celebrity students, including future musicians David Bowie and Leonard Cohen. Despite the successful creation of an Eastern religious institution in the heart of Britain, not all was well with Trungpa. Throughout his time in the United Kingdom, Trungpa took to heavy drinking and consorted with many of his female students.[2] What distressed him most was the notion that the Tibetan monastic tradition was an obstacle for his aspiring students. As a lama, he felt that he was perceived as an exotic higher being incapable of vital communication with regular humans.[3] In 1969, Trungpa met with a severe injury in a car crash which left him partially paralyzed on the left side of his body. Despite these injuries, which would complicate his health for the rest of his life, the

[2] Tom Clark, The Great Naropa Poetry Wars, Santa Barbara, CA: Cadmus Editions, 1980, 10-11.

[3] Marcia Usow interviewed and filmed by Shirley S. Steele, May 18, 23, 2006, The Maria Rogers Oral History Program, http://boulderlibrary.org/carnegie/index.html (accessed July 11, 2011).

Rinpoche did not see his accident as an impediment but rather as a message.[4]

Trungpa reasoned that in order to effectively spread Buddhist teachings in the West, "the dharma needed to be taught free from cultural trappings and religious fascination."[5] In order to live his new teachings, the Rinpoche renounced his vows and demoted himself to a lay teacher. Even more radical, the monk took a wife. Diana Pybus, a sixteen-year-old disciple of Trungpa's, married the guru and took on the name Diana Mukpo. The Rinpoche cultivated his new approach. Instead of inviting students into the trappings of the monastic world, he decided to embrace the world and culture of the West, starting with his attire.[6] Trungpa began his new path to enlightenment by discarding his robes in favor of expensive suits or leisure ware.[7] This new direction in spiritual expression along with Trungpa's recent marriage deeply troubled his co-founder Akong Rinpoche, who feared that his rejection of inscrutability and mysticism would result in a serious lapse of

[4] Steve Silberman, "Married to the Guru." *Shambhala Sun*, November 2006. http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2998&Itemid=0 (accessed July 24, 2011).

[5] Diana Mukpo, *Crazy Wisdom*, Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 1991. 187.

[6] Silberman, 1

[7] Hugh H. Urban, "The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, the New Age, and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism," *History of Religions*, Vol. 39 No 3. P, 268-304, 282

principles amounting to "conmanship."[8] In 1970, after a final falling out with Akong Rinpoche and the Samye Ling establishment, Trungpa decided that the proper place to reinvent himself was in the cultural and spiritual zeitgeist of 1970s America. The United States seemed especially ripe for new spiritual principles.

Most historians see the popular American understanding of the phenomenon of the emergence of "new religions" in the postwar era as distorted generalization. The popular understanding is that many Americans, particularly those of the baby-boom generation grew disillusioned with the stodgy conformist tendencies of established Judeo-Christian religions. Experimenting with psychedelic drugs, communal living and new music, these boomers became the budding Western acolytes of Eastern religions, most notably Hinduism and Buddhism. Often these acolytes received their spiritual guidance from celebrity gurus, the most famous of which was Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, founder of Transcendental Meditation and spiritual mentor to The Beatles. When historians such as Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin observe the religious climate of the postwar era, particularly that of the 1960s, the most significant religious dialogue and action is from revitalized Judeo-

[8] Clark, 13. The exact meaning of "conmanship" is not clear, and does not appear in the *Mirriam-Webster's Dictionary.* According to http://wiki.answers.com, it is defined as "a created word meaning corporate scheming."

Christian traditions.[9] For conservative Protestants, their most celebrated spiritual leader was Billy Graham with his revival of personal moral values as the guiding force of personal and political decision making. For liberal protestant Christians, the most celebrated was Martin Luther King Jr. for his role in directing the Social Gospel towards the causes of civil rights and the war on poverty. Catholics and Jews also had equivalently powerful leaders such as anti-war activist, Friar Daniel Berrigan and the communalist rabbi, Itzik Lodzer.[10]

According to Isserman and Kazin, the novelty of the emergence of non-Western religions belied the limited impact they actually had on American society. Despite media attention and the endorsement of celebrities such as Allen Ginsberg, The Beatles and The Grateful Dead (named after the Tibetan Book of the Dead), the new Hindus, Buddhists, and other adherents of new

[9] Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 242-244. For more information, read Chapter 13 of Isserman and Kazan's book titled "Many Faiths: The 60s Reformation." Isserman and Kazin also relate the postwar American religious climate to international trends as well such as the promotion of religious tolerance and integration as a statement against godless Communism during the Cold War. Isserman and Kazin cite global events such as the liberal reforms of Vatican II and the growing geopolitical importance of the Middle East in shaping liberal and conservative Catholicism and Judaism in the United States. Isserman and Kazin state that perhaps the most significant element of this religious revival is the dissipation of denominational social divisions in American society and the rise of the divide between theological conservatives and liberals. There is no assertion of the significance of Black American Islam as advocated by figures such as Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X in the account.

[10] Ibid, 250-254.

religions always constituted a small fraction of the American religious landscape. Even in the San Francisco Bay Area, only ten percent of the population took part in these new religions.[11] Isserman and Kazin imply that the reason for the inability of new non-Western religions to significantly alter the American religious climate lay in the demographics of their new acolytes. The majority of new American adherents to Hinduism, Buddhism and other Eastern practices were overwhelmingly white and college-educated youth who were disenchanted with mainstream Judeo-Christian values they perceived as tainted by the corporatist West. Since the followers of new religions were in a minority and did not reflect a broad social, ethnic or economic spectrum, their impact would be largely confined to their own small communities.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche gained followers in the United States because he was willing to adapt to the ways of his hippie and counter-culture adherents. The small, unassuming town of Barnet, Vermont is where Chogyam Trungpa's legacy as a forefather of American Buddhism took root. American students who had received training at Samye Ling assisted Trungpa and his wife in obtaining visas.[12] Trungpa and his students soon

[11] Isserman and Kazin, 256-259.

[12] Silberman, 2.

established a meditation practice center in rural Vermont which became known as Tail of the Tiger.

Jonathan Eric, one of Trungpa's first American students in America, recalled the early atmosphere of Tail of the Tiger as being extremely informal and disorganized. Aside from a few brief meditation sessions, there were no formal programs or classes. Contributing to a sense of disorder was that the original facility of Tail of the Tiger consisted of a single-floor shrine room, which held twenty people at most.[13] All present, including the former spiritual autocrat, delighted in the informality and banter. The conduct of meditation classes between Trungpa and his students took on an egalitarian format. Diana Mukpo later attributed this approach to Trungpa's own engaging personality. He would engage his students less as a master and more as a peer, which encouraged deeper communication between them.[14] Community meetings eventually were held "Native American" style. Trungpa cultivated loyalty from his students this way and also by participating in their hippie hijinks and creative pursuits whether it was listening to their guitar sessions or wearing Eric's hippie hat.[15]

---

[13] Jonathan Eric, Interviewed by William Fordham, March 14 2002, The Chronicles Project, http://www.chronicleproject.com/stories_17_b.html (accessed July 15, 2011).

[14] Mukpo, *Crazy Wisdom*, 2.

[15] Eric, March 14, 2002

Trungpa's fame grew though his lecture circuits and the publication of his books on meditation. These tours also resulted in the cultivation of more friends and allies. In California in 1971 Trungpa met with the much revered Sunryu Suzuki Roshi, founder of the San Francisco Zen Center and the man whose Zen teachings fueled the Beat Generation. The Rinpoche and the Roshi got along very well. In fact, there was an informal exchange of students between Suzuki's students interested in Tibetan meditation practice and Trungpa's students who wanted to experience Japanese Zen practice at the Tassajara Zen Mountain Center near Carmel, California.[16] Most prolific among his new friends, though, were the Beat writers themselves.

Beat poets and artists were drawn to Trungpa due to his eccentric personality and his interest in the arts of his new home. In the late 1960s, Anne Waldman, a recent graduate from Bennington College in Vermont, was making her name as a rising poet in the New York School of poets and artists. Basing herself in New York City in 1966, Waldman served as assistant director of the St Mark's Poetry Project in Manhattan's East Village. Housed at historic St Mark's Church in-the-Bowery, the Poetry Project embodied the creative spirit of the East Village, hosting poetry readings, workshops and publishing magazines. The project also hosted political activities and events. Waldman had developed an interest in Buddhism in the early 1960s. She met

[16] Usow, May 18, 23, 2006.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche in New York City in 1970.[17] Waldman found the monk intriguing. His eccentricities and provocative nature made him more like her fellow poets than a pious, ethereal teacher. Waldman especially appreciated Trungpa's passion for the arts, noting that when he first came to the United States he declared "'I want to meet the poets, you know, take me to your poets.' And who comes here to meet the poets?"[18] Waldman's experience in guiding poetry workshops and hosting events at St. Mark's would prove useful in the years to come.

Allen Ginsberg saw Chogyam Trungpa not only as a spiritual mentor, but as an egalitarian spiritualist like himself. They first met under purely accidental circumstances. In New York City in 1972, Allen Ginsberg and his father, Louis, left the Museum of Modern Art and attempted to hail a taxi. Standing next to them was a rather strange man from Tibet who had apparently hailed the same taxi as the Ginsbergs. A brief argument over who would take the taxi ensued but was soon resolved. The accidental encounter proved to be an auspicious moment for both Ginsberg and Trungpa.[19] Just as

---

[17] Anne Waldman, Co-founder of Naropa University, interviewed by Ross R. Webster, April 12, 2010, phone. The interview with Waldman was amicable and yielded useful information about the formative years of the Naropa Institute; she did not seem willing to talk about the events relating to the Poetry Wars. She also talked extensively about Naropa's legacy regarding Colorado's poetry scene, which albeit informative, was not of primary concern given the tightly limited timeline and focus of this thesis in its current state.

[18] Waldman, April 10, 2010.

[19] Ibid.

Anne Waldman did, Ginsberg found a kindred spirit in Trungpa, especially in regards to his practice of "crazy wisdom." Ginsberg had been infatuated with Eastern religious and spiritual traditions since the early years of his poetry career, but the spiritual relationship between Ginsberg and Trungpa struck a much deeper chord than the poet's previous dalliances with the Hare Krishnas and other Eastern spiritual imports. Ginsberg stated that part of the reason was that, in the past, poets seeking new spirituality had to go through the likes of dubious characters such as Madame Blavatsky, Alister Crowley or "swami so-and-so who comes over from India."[20] He believed that thanks to authentic lamas like Trungpa, their ancient practices no longer belonged exclusively to the holy men of the Himalayas. The Tibetan diaspora, he said, had taken all of their legendary and mystical information, and brought it "right here to be confronted."[21]

---

[20]Clark, 55. Russian-American Madame Blavatsky and the infamous British occultist Alister Crowley were the respective founders of the Theosophy movement and the Golden Order of the Hermeneutical Dawn. Both can be considered the Victorian era equivalents to the "new religions" of the mid-Twentieth Century. While both figures were revered by a minority on both sides of the Atlantic, they were usually regarded as cranks, con-artists and in Crowley's case, a sexual and moral deviant. Theosophy borrowed tenants such as magic, séances and reincarnation liberally from Eastern religions, and is regarded as the ancestor of the modern New Age Movement. For information about Madame Blavatsky's roll in importing Eastern religious practices to the West see: Mark Bevil "The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 62, No. 3 (Autumn, 1994), pp.747-767

[21] Ibid.

Colorado moved the Rinpoche more than any other place in the United States at first for its nostalgic value. However, he may have set his sights elsewhere if not for Karl and Marcia Usow, two married faculty members at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The Usows bonded over Trungpa's teachings after reading his book, *Meditation in Action.* They were inspired to seek him out in Scotland and invite him to teach at Boulder. By that time, however, Trungpa had already left Samye Ling Monastery. The couple finally relayed their invitation through Montreal where Trungpa lived before attaining his visa. Initially, Trungpa felt no desire to go to Boulder but was persuaded when the Usows wrote back saying that one hundred potential students gathered anxious to see him.[22] Diana Mukpo later hinted that her husband was also persuaded by the postcard of Colorado the Usows had sent. According to Marcia Usow, Diana said that "one of the things that he looked at and he said, 'Oh, those are cute mountains.'—having grown up in calm in eastern Tibet. "[23] The Usows and other friends arranged for Trungpa's arrival, and secured him a job teaching Buddhism in the university's philosophy department.[24]

[22] Usow, May 18, 23, 2006.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid.

Barbara Dilley, a former director of the Naropa Institute, believes that it was not simply nostalgia fueling Trungpa's mind when he laid eyes on the Rocky Mountains. In Colorado he saw the perfect environment to develop "the teaching that he was doing on the traditional Tibetan Buddhist dharma."[25] As he did in Scotland and Barnet, Vermont, Trungpa established a meditation center named Karma Dzong in downtown Boulder in 1971. Later that same year, he purchased 360 acres of land west of Fort Collins, Colorado at Red Feather Lakes. This was to become the Rocky Mountain Dharma Center. Other meditation centers were established in southern Colorado as well as in six other states including the Mudra Theater Group, which taught traditional Tibetan dance.[26] In 1973 the Vajradhatu Organization was incorporated in order to better coordinate transmission of the Rinpoche's teachings and consolidate the management of earnings from the centers. In less than four years, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche had become one of the most prosperous new religious leaders in the United States with landholdings nearing one

[25] Barbara Dilley, interviewed and filmed by Shirley S. Steele, The Maria Rogers Oral History Program, June 3, 2005, http://boulderlibrary.org/carnegie/index.html (accessed June 21, 2011).

[26] Clark, 17 The Rocky Mountain Dharma Center was renamed the Shambhala Mountain Center shortly after Chogyam Trungpa's death.

million dollars in value.[27] However, it was no longer enough for Trungpa merely to establish meditation centers.

[27] Clark, 17.

CHAPTER 2

LIBERAL POLITICS, LIFSTYLES AND EDUCATION IN POSTWAR BOULDER

According to Amy L. Scott's *Remaking Urban in the American West: Lifestyle Politics, Micropolitan Urbanism, and Hip Capitalism in Boulder Colorado, 1958-1978*, Boulder was a prime example of the crossroads of two trends in the postwar American West. The rapid suburbanization of Western cities and the fledgling environmentalist movement would be a long source of social and political tension in Boulder. By the 1970s, however, new substrata of Boulder liberals managed to find an economic compromise between these two trends.

The roots of Boulder's environmentalist movement can be traced back to 1903 when the Boulder City Improvement Association organized to improve the living standards of their young city. Frederick Law Olmstead Jr., America's premier landscape architect, and son of the mastermind of New York City's Central Park, arrived in 1908 at the invitation of the Boulder City Improvement Organization. At the end of his two year stay, Olmstead produced a booklet titled "The Improvement of Boulder, Colorado: Report to City Improvement Association." The master architect was greatly impressed with the beauty of the city and believed it had great promise if his guidelines

were considered. Among the measures he urged Boulderites to take were to outlaw billboards, bury powerlines and to convert twenty percent more land to parks. After Olmstead's departure, several city planners upheld the commitment to open space policies in Boulder. Saco Reink DeBoers, a Dutch immigrant and Denver city planner pioneered zoning schemes and park planning in Boulder as well as many other cities and towns in the Mountain States Region. DeBoer cautioned Boulderites that unchecked residential growth would destroy the proximity to nature prided by the city. Unfortunately for DeBoer and like-minded Boulder city council members such as Paul Danish, most Boulderites favored the expansion of residential space.[28]

In the 1950s, Boulder as well as the rest of Colorado experienced unprecedented growth in part due to the establishment of several scientific research and defense industry complexes in the state, including the federal government's Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons facility. Meanwhile, many new residents in Boulder were drawn to its beautiful natural surroundings amidst growing economic opportunities and the expectation of a fresh, healthy lifestyle. By the late fifties, a coalition of environmentalists closely associated with the University of Colorado began to speak out against the infringement of rapid growth on the natural landscape. It, they argued, was more important to

[28] Noel, Thomas J. and Dan W. Corson, *Boulder County: An Illustrated History*, Boulder, CO: Historic Boulder, Inc., 1999. P. 140-145.

the lives and livelihoods of Boulderites than any benefits of urban sprawl. Although they faced a steep battle against the pro-development conservatives and liberals in the city, the environmentalists gained new converts in the form of new "lifestyle liberals."[29]

The lifestyle liberals did not just advocate restraint on development in their city. From their experience in the student youth movements, many left-leaning young Boulderites abandoned street and campus protests in favor of the political process in order to create laws protecting the freedom to participate in culturally distinct lifestyles. They proactively worked the system so successfully that they essentially became it or, more accurately, became a potent element of it. In 1971, Boulderites elected a new liberal city council that sought to encourage minority participation in local government, protect women's reproductive rights through free medical clinics, and prevent social

[29] For more information about the social transformation of Boulder from the 1950s to the 1970s, read Amy L.Scott's dissertation, *Remaking Urban in the American West: Lifestyle Politics, Micropolitan Urbanism, and Hip Capitalism in Boulder Colorado, 1958-1978* (Albuquerque, NM: The University of New Mexico, 2007) Scott uses Boulder as an example of the influence of coalitions of liberal communities including classic mainstream liberals, radical New Left politicians and newly emerged "lifestyle" liberals and "hip" capitalists in reshaping postwar Western cities in the United States. In her dissertation, Scott demonstrates how lifestyle liberals, managed to shape Boulder's commitment to lifestyle diversity and environmental politics by winning elections and gaining control of city planning agencies, p.108-115.

inequalities and intolerance of diverse lifestyles. However, in order to reach certain municipal goals, the lifestyle liberals did have to make compromises and concessions to conservative counter-parts. The new liberals in the government passed city ordinances prohibiting hippies and transients from occupying public space in Boulder. They also believed it necessary to put the campaign for gay rights on hold for decades before they could be realized. Despite these setbacks, the lifestyle liberals achieved remarkable success in transforming highly politicized social agendas, such as sustainable living, into sound economic decisions that could improve the livelihoods of Boulder suburbanites.[30] Open Space legislation gained popular support again. In 1972 Mayor Robert Knecht and other civic leaders established Historic Boulder Inc., a corporation dedicated to preserving historic landmarks and curbing re-development in the city.[31]Organic food companies, such as Celestial Seasonings, Alfalfa's Market, and Horizon Organic Dairy, began their business at this time and rose to national prominence. The new hip capitalists of Boulder managed to turn their radical life choices, philosophies and religion into marketable commodities.[32]

[30] Scott, 155-158.

[31] Noel and Corson, 155-157, 164-166.

[32] Scott, 299-317.

Aside from the commercial viability of alternative lifestyles and religions, the most important aspect of Boulder for Chogyam Trungpa was that it was a university town; it was a community fueled by the exchange of ideas. According to Marcia Usow, Trungpa's interest in education came from his time spent at Oxford University where he had conversed with great thinkers such as the American Trappist monk, Thomas Merton.[33] In 1974, Trungpa established the Nalanda Foundation, which aimed to expand his teachings beyond meditation and reciting of Buddhist doctrines. Named after an ancient Buddhist university in India, the Nalanda Foundation coordinated extra-meditational activities such as Japanese Archery, flower arranging, tea ceremonies, and health care, psychotherapy, and dance programs. Trungpa explained that the purpose of these programs was to bring art into everyday life. That same year, Trungpa set about his most ambitious project to date, the creation of a home-grown Buddhist university in order to expand on Nalanda's mission of education. He named it Naropa Institute after an ancient Buddhist sage.

When describing his vision for the Naropa Institute, Chogyam Trungpa was fond of saying that when East meets West, "sparks will fly."[34] Dramatic as

[33] Usow, May 18, 23, 2006.

[34] Reed Bye, "The Founding Vision of Naropa," *Recalling Chogyam Trungpa,* Boston MA: Shambhala Publications Inc., 2005, 143.

it might have sounded, Trungpa did not have Gary Snyder's essay "Buddhism and the Coming Revolution" in mind. Snyder proposed in that essay, that instead of trying to salvage the doomed traditional American culture, that a new culture can be "reconstructed from the unconscious, through meditation."[35] In fact, the climate of cynicism and negation of Western cultural traditions is what Trungpa found most distressing about America in the 1970s. He told students that to reject their original traditions was to reject one's self and to deny an important source of human wisdom. [36] What Trungpa wanted was glue, not a full-on demolition, to improve the values of his new home. The glue he felt should come from a new educational model.

Trungpa was not the only postwar religious leader to believe that existing educational institutions were to blame for America's lapse in ethics and morality, but he was ambivalent about the relationship between students and the academic establishment. Both religious conservatives and liberals believed that vice and existential evil was seeping into academic establishments and students should be the spiritual vanguard for the American future. In the 1950s, Bill Bright the founder of the Campus Crusade

[35] Gary Snyder, "Buddhism and the Coming Revolution," *Arthur Magazine.* For more information about Gary Snyder's theories on revolutionary politics and a utopian American culture based on Buddhist and Native American spirituality, read: Richard Candida Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California.* University of California Press (Berkeley CA; 1995).

[36] Bye, 145.

for Christ lamented that despite the Christian foundations of many American colleges and universities, most university students were "spiritually illiterate," and spoon-fed skepticism by liberal modernist professors.[37] For Bright and other Evangelical Christian leaders, the postwar American university was a Trojan horse and made it their mission to re-Christianize university students to save them from sin and subversive realist ideologies which they believed to be gateways to Communism and godlessness.[38]

On the opposite end of the socio-political spectrum, liberal Christians were committed to the idea that university campuses remain forums for public expression of free speech no matter how unpopular. Doug Rossinow's *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity, and the New Left in America* documents the influence of the University of Texas' YMCA, YWCA and similar liberal Christian organizations in shaping student activist movements during the Sixties. For these liberal Christians, the pursuit of "authenticity" was a crusade not against subversive philosophies, but against complacency, apathy and social injustice. Their crusade was to insure that the universities

[37] John G. Turner. *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America.* The University of North Carolina Press. Chapel Hill NC: 2008. P. 42. For more information about Bill Bright's crucial role in the rise of conservative Christianity in the postwar era, read John G. Turner's *Bill Bright & Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America.*

[38] Ibid, p. 42-45.

not concede to the designs of the status quo who insisted on the promotion of racial inequality and the war economy.[39]

The vision for the Naropa Institute was ascribed by Chogyam Trungpa on June 10, 1974 as he addressed students and faculty attending the opening convocation ceremony for Naropa which was held in an auditorium at University of Colorado at Boulder. He denounced the partisan nature of American academic institutions. He announced that his new educational project, above all, would be students and faculty working together and relating to each other on the basis of trust "which seems to be lacking enormously in the Western educational tradition."[40] The main problem in Western academic education, Trungpa believed, was inflexibility between notions of the past, the present and the future which created corruption and drudgery in a society. Instead, he insisted that his students embrace a concept called "newness." "Newness" simply implied that one should approach academic disciplines and cultural traditions with mindfulness and awareness so that wisdom can be received into the world with fresh life and adaptability. As much as Trungpa

[39] Doug Rossinow. *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity and the New Left in America.* Columbia University Press. New York: 1998. P. 83-109. For more information on the influence of liberal Protestant Christianity, particularly influenced by existential Christian theologians Reinhold Niebuhr, Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonheoffer and Martin Luther King Jr., in shaping the New Left student movements of the sixties, read Doug Rossinow's *The Politics of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity and the New Left in America.*

[40] Bye, 145.

was concerned about dissolving cultural apathy, he warned his students against “spiritual materialism” or false perceptions of enlightenment which could lead them into ego-centric self-serving spirituality absent of mindfulness and understanding of others.[41] The opening of the Naropa Institute was the culmination of three decades of education, relocation and adaptation for the Rinpoche.

[41] Ibid, 146-147.

CHAPTER 3

"CRAZY WISDOM": NAROPA STRUGGLES WHILE ARTISTS ASSEMBLE

In 1976, Allen Ginsberg wrote a letter to his friend, the iconic folk musician Bob Dylan. He expressed the high ideals that he, Trungpa and Anne Waldman hoped would carry their institute into the future and he lamented realities weighing it down. Ginsberg regaled Dylan with the extraordinary achievements of the institute from 1974 to 1976, particularly those of the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics which Ginsberg and Waldman named after their departed friend and fellow Beat icon. The institute, he told Dylan, was a place where poets could meet cross country, "fuck students, open mind actual inside teaching," and receive the wisdom of lamas and Zen masters.[42] The purpose of the letter is clear. Ginsberg, amidst the Naropa Institute's critical fund raising campaign of 1976, was asking Dylan for money to help with the expenses of those extraordinary deeds.

He informed Dylan that the total debt for the summer of 1976 amounted to $90,000 for library expenses; taping lectures; rent for buildings; and airfares for all of the visiting meditation masters, poets, theologians,

---

[42] Allen Ginsberg, *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg,* edited by Bill Morgan, Philadelphia PA: Da Capo Press, 2008, 387.

classical musicians and even biologists.[43] Ginsberg assured Dylan that even if the whole project collapsed next month, there was nothing to worry about in the long run. He told Dylan whatever donation he could give provided "a historic opportunity to center refine and speed up the process of benevolent mindfulness genius near (the) Rockies' spinal height."[44] Apparently Dylan never responded to his friend's request, but the institute prevailed into 1977 with the same optimistic outlook from its leadership despite its uphill struggle for survival and credibility.

For Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman, the appeal of Trungpa's idea for an experimental Buddhist-inspired university harkened back to the early years of the Beat movement. In *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California,* Richard Candida-Smith examines the role of Beat Generation poets and writers in shaping some of the ethics and ideals that framed their spiritual quest. Almost all of the writers of the Beat Generation shared disenchantment with established Western religion. They were generally more inclined towards the spiritual practices of Asia, particularly Zen Buddhism. None of the Beat writers were as immersed in Zen Buddhist practice and doctrine as the California-based poet and early environmentalist leader, Gary Snyder. Not only did Snyder study Zen but he also lived in Japan for over a

[43] Ginsberg, 388.

[44] Ibid, 389. The editor notes at the end of the letter that Dylan never replied.

decade. Candida-Smith stresses that the most important aspect about Snyder was that he presented counterculture as a rational way of being and a force for social responsibility.[45]

Unlike many of his peers, Snyder did not believe that the solution to American society's ills lay in demonizing Western culture and romanticizing non-Western cultures. Rather he hoped that he could find a balance "between American individualism and the need for cooperation."[46] He advocated education and examination of all the myths, arts, crafts, and methods towards enlightenment. Snyder hoped that over time the wisdom of seemingly backwards countries such as Cuba and Vietnam would overcome the materialism of Western society and foster the values of equitable wealth distribution and land stewardship. Snyder addressed his message to the nation at the "Human Be-In" in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park in 1967 where he told his adherents to reject mainstream American values and take LSD. However, as Snyder married and became more devoted to his family,

[45] Richard Candida-Smith, *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry, and Politics in California* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 370.

[46] Ibid, 379.

his focus localized to their new family home in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California.[47]

Named Kitkidizze, after a native shrub, Snyder's new community was more than a mere hippie commune Snyder hosted poetry workshops which he hoped would improve his students' appreciation of poetry while shaping their life philosophy and improving their approach to everyday tasks. Snyder and his neighbors organized a school district for their children, built and improved roads, and established a Zen meditation center.[48] Richard Candida-Smith assesses that ultimately the grand utopian counterculture societies that Snyder and other California artists dreamed of could not exist "outside the catastrophe of oppression."[49] In other words, utopia could not exist without the material evils that it defined itself against. Despite this paradox, Candida-Smith acknowledges the ultimate value of Snyder's vision. The workings of Kitkidizze demonstrated that the dream of utopia allowed Snyder and others to seek alternatives to existing structures of daily life.[50] This is what the

[47] Candida-Smith, 378.

[48] Ibid, 378-379.

[49] Ibid, 398.

[50] Ibid, 398-399.

founders of Naropa hoped the aspiring graduates of their school would accomplish, provided that it would survive past its initial year.

Naropa's lack of a permanent campus and a solid financial base impaired its path towards accreditation and academic legitimacy for most of its first decade of existence. The institute relied primarily on tuition fees, private gifts or grants, sales and services of auxiliary enterprises and whatever federal grants that came its way. Aside from these resources, friends of the institution gave loans at low interest rates and for long periods of time. In the summer of 1974, the Naropa Institute had $5,000 in donations and $5,000 in loans. The meager funds did not trouble the Naropa faculty as they only expected four hundred students to attend the inaugural summer quarter.[51] After all, even with the inclusion of a few new courses such as dance, psychology, cognitive science, and poetics, the fledgling institute did not seem much different from Trungpa's small concentrated meditation retreat in Vermont or his cross-country seminars held in the early seventies.[52] As it turned out, the summer of 1974 was different indeed.

Preparations for that first quarter began in the fall of 1973. Potential faculty members received invitations from the institute offering room, board,

---

[51] Judith Lief, *Naropa Institute Status Study Report to the Commission on Higher Education of The North Central Association of Colleges & Secondary Schools,* 1977, 190.

[52]Margarette F. Eby, Guillermina Engelbrecht and Glenn A. Niemeyer" Report of a Visit to Naropa Institute Boulder Colorado, March 12-14, 1984," Commission on Institutes of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, March, 1984, 1.

travel expenses and three hundred dollars. Many in the broad list of potential faculty included members of the Vajradhatu community and friends of the institute such as Ram Dass, a Hindu spiritual teacher and associate of Timothy Leary. In the winter of 1973-74 and the spring of 1974, the Naropa Institute's mostly unpaid volunteer administrative staff sent out 50,000 catalogues, put up posters in cities across the country and ran a modest radio advertising campaign to promote the new academic project. About the same time that the first student registration forms arrived, the seven-member staff received their first salaries of fifty dollars a week.[53]

The fledgling institute lacked adequate administrative structures. Its staff had little experience in financial control and found itself grossly unprepared for Naropa's first year. Much to their surprise, 1,700 students registered for that first term. Although the Naropa staff welcomed them, the unanticipated influx of students necessitated a rapid increase in staff, facility rentals and student accommodation. Although the first session of the Naropa Institute was an amazing success in terms of enrollment, it was also left the school with its first deficit.[54] As the fall semester approached, the financial weight of the miraculous summer began to set in. The institute had no major

[53] John Baker and Jeremy Hayward, *Naropa Institute Status Study Report to The Commission On Higher Education of The North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools,* June, 1975, 2-3.

[54] Lief, 1977, 190.

source of regular operational revenue, and the unforeseen growth in student enrollment meant that budget projections were difficult. The student influx also meant that large down payments on housing and facilities had to be made due to a lack of track records with landlords. The lack of managerial experience among Naropa's staff made fundraising difficult.[55]

According to Barbara Dilley who had just recently arrived as a dance instructor, all of the Naropa staff that summer was "scrambling around to rent spaces at the university and to rent folding chairs and tables and try to set up classrooms."[56] The first Naropa offices at 1441 Broadway were originally a bus depot and later an organic grocery store. Its large interior spaces were ideal for auditorium-size presentations.[57]

Enrollment kept growing. For its first two years, the Naropa Institute seemed to be constantly on the move as they continually needed more space. First they moved to 1111 Pearl Street where the Boulder Bookstore currently resides. Later that summer, the institute rented space in the Sacred Heart Catholic School gymnasium and then at 1345 Spruce Street near the Boulder Theater. Finally in 1976, the institute staff rented the Pick Building, a

[55] Ibid, 190-191.

[56] Barbara Dilley, interviewed and filmed by Shirley S. Steele, The Maria Rogers Oral History Program, June 3, 2005, http://boulderlibrary.org/carnegie/index.html (accessed August 28, 2011).

[57] Dilly, June 3, 2005.

former medical facility which was refurbished to accommodate mediation rooms on its top floor.[58] Despite this improvement, the institute would have no permanent facilities until 1987.

By the winter of 1975, the institute made slight profits from its small winter and spring programs while additional cash flow came mostly from loans. However, in that same winter and spring season student attendance dropped several hundred below projected figures. The 1977 status study report to the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools assumed the cause for this drop was the absence of the Hindu spiritual teacher, Ram Das, that season. The financial hurdles got higher in the summer and fall of 1975. The institute spent $12,000 for a seven-week consulting session by the Academy of Educational Development. Although the institute received nearly $72,000 from individual donations and 25,000 from an individual loan, expenses increased due to the initiation of degree and certificate programs for January 1976.[59] Despite financial difficulties throughout the year of 1975, the institute continued to initiate new modular programs. The modular programs were designed to allow students and faculty to live together and share input for the courses, arts and crafts and meditation studies. The institute also designed a similar program for professional psychologists and

[58] Usow, May 18, 23, 2006.

[59] Lief, 191-192.

psychiatrists. However, the institute staff could not devote as much time to these new developments as implementing year-round study took priority.[60]

By the summer of 1976 the institute's finances began to improve. In 1976, the Naropa staff established a fundraising drive which meant that the institute could expand its financial resources and increase stability. The institute finally received solid revenues that year. Tuition fees brought in $385,000. Auxiliary sales and services amounted to $130,000. The National Endowment for the Arts donated $5,000 for the institute's music program. The Foundation for the Realization of Man, a non-profit organization in San Francisco, submitted a 5,000 dollar unrestricted grant. With these substantial donations and grants, the institute decided that it could award fellowships to its most prospective students and faculty. Barbara Dilley received a fellowship of $18,000. Nicolas Calas, a visiting Greek poet invited by Ginsberg, received a fellowship of $760.[61]

Improved fundraising was the primary reason that the Naropa Institute continued in the summer and fall of 1976 without having to temporarily suspend operations. Without accreditation the institute had to rely on tuition to meet most of its expenses. This was an extraordinary and dubious position for a small fledgling institute, especially since most of the short-term loans

[60] *Naropa Institute Newsletter,* Naropa Institute September 1977, 2.

[61] Lief,. 192-193.

bridging its deficit were due that year. Even without the aid of Bob Dylan, Naropa succeeded in raising $100,000 in less than ten weeks, mostly through small donations from a multitude of people. The writers and editors of Naropa's first newsletter interpreted the donations as a sign that the institute was seen as a valuable venture in American education.[62]

The presence of iconic Beat Generation poets and writers invited by Ginsberg and Waldman to either read or teach at the institute's Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics was a major draw for aspiring students. In the Naropa Institute's first, newsletter published in the fall of 1977, the writers and editors exuded the triumphs and highlights of the summer of 1976. The Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics hosted classes and readings by prominent poets and authors, such as John Ashbery, Robert Duncan, Diane Wakoski, Diane di Prima and William S. Burroughs. [63] Burroughs became a teaching writer in residence in Boulder. Although Burroughs, the teacher, was somewhat removed from his dangerous past as Burroughs the provocateur and tortured heroin junkie, he was no less a compelling and powerful presence at Naropa.[64] While the School of Disembodied Poetics with its

[62] Naropa Institute, September 1977, 3.

[63] Ibid, 3.

[64] Marilyn Webb, "Naropa Institute Colorado's New Mecca for the Arts," *Denver Magazine,* October 1977, 36. For more information about the interactions between Trungpa and the

visiting Beat poets was perhaps the most successful attraction for the Naropa Institute, it was by no means the only one.

Dancers, musicians and psychological health experts, arrived in Boulder either to teach, learn or both at the Naropa Institute. Barbara Dilley and other performance-dance theater performers integrated voice movement and meditation for performance improvisation training. A number of established and respected psychologists and psychiatrists arrived to help augment Naropa's Buddhist psychology program. The psychologists and psychoanalysts who offered their expertise ranged from more conventional practitioners such as Elsa First, a disciple of Anna Freud, to Robert K Hall from the experimental Gestalt Institute of San Francisco. The Beat writers and poets, along with the dancers, musicians and psychological health experts, also drew the attention of Chogyam Trungpa's fellow meditation masters from both Tibetan and Zen traditions.[65]

Most of the early articles about the Naropa Institute published by *The Denver Post* and *The Rocky Mountain News* focused on the influx of artists, authors and poets into Boulder. One such student was a young classically trained musician from New York City named Peter Lieberson. His father,

---

Beat Generation poets and writers, read Anne Waldman and Laura Wright's *Beats At Naropa: An Anthology.* Their collected anthology documents interviews readings and symposia held at the Naropa Institute.

[65] Naropa Institute, September 1977, 2.

Goddard Lieberson, was the former president of Columbia Records, and his mother, Vera Zorina Lieberson, was an accomplished dancer and actress. Peter Lieberson could have easily remained and made a career for himself in the New York classical music scene but instead chose the counter-cultural bastion near the Rocky Mountains.[66] In an interview with Arlynn Nellhaus of *The Denver Post,* Lieberson stated that his desire to leave New York stemmed from disillusionment with pointless high pressure career chasing and hustling. Lieberson also left for financial reasons. He had run out of unemployment compensation and grants in New York.[67]

Given his dubious career trajectory, Lieberson was naturally attracted to the Rinpoche's teachings on abandoning material pursuits in favor of meditation and self-discovery. When the Rinpoche invited Lieberson to teach a seminar in meditation in the institute's music program, Lieberson moved to Boulder where he found many like-minded people. When asked by Marjorie Barrett of *The Rocky Mountain News* about a rising interest in sitting meditation, Lieberson stated that American materialism "has not been much help in getting rid of dissatisfaction."[68] Like Leiberson, many of the students

[66] Arlynn Nelhaus, "Musician Discovers 'Niche' in Boulder," *The Denver Post,.* July 14, 1976, 66.

[67] Nelhaus, July 14, 1976, 66.

[68] Marjorie Barrett, "Composer trades music for Shambhala" *The Rocky Mountain News,* August 3, 1977, 34.

at Naropa were transplants from the East Coast.[69] Although delighted to be in the company of so many poets and musicians from familiar environs, Lieberson was concerned about the relationship between his newly found arts "mecca" and the state hosting them.[70] He desired that the Naropa Institute be a part of Colorado, not a "collection of people from other places who dropped here."[71]

Meanwhile, the Colorado mainstream press seemed delighted with the new collection of artists, poets, writers and musicians. What mattered to them was that the artists were gathering in Boulder and the Naropa Institute signaled a rebirth of the same creative energy that fueled the San Francisco beat renaissance and the music of the sixties. One *Denver Post* headline in August of 1976 read, "Boulder Innovative Music Capital-Because of Naropa."[72] In the article, writer Arlynn Nellhaus highlighted the presence of jazz musicians Don Cherry, Dan Blackwell, Karl Berger and other lesser-known musicians. The article emphasized the experimentation by the musicians such as their ability to master a variety of instruments ranging from piano to vibraphone to African stringed instruments. Their musical range,

[69] Ibid, 38.

[70] Nellhaus, July 14, 1976, 66.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Arlynn Nellhaus, "Boulder Innovative Music Capital-Because of Naropa," *The Denver Post,* August 18, 1976, 41.

Nellhaus described, ran the full gamut from “mystical to soulful straight-ahead jazz.”[73]

The Naropa story also came across the airwaves in Colorado. Allen Ginsberg, a guest on KRNW Radio, emphasized experimentation and playfulness as part of the atmosphere of the Naropa Institute. On his broadcast, Ginsberg described one of his courses, “Mind, Mouth and Page,” a poetry workshop beginning with the poetry of William Blake and ending in the twentieth century with the likes of Jack Kerouac, Gregory Corso, and himself. He also spoke about the completion of his blues album, “First Blues, Rags, Ballads and Harmonium Songs,” which he achieved under the guidance of Bob Dylan.[74] Ginsberg expressed optimism that the institute would last either a hundred years or until “there is a totally sparkling poetry school that will transmit the lyrical minds and diamonds of the past.”[75]

[73] Nellhaus, August 18, 1976, 41.

[74] Andrew Cleary, “Ginsberg concentrates on Buddhism, blues,” *The Rocky Mountain News,* April 1, 1977, 6-7.

[75] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

NAROPA ADJUSTS AS BOULDER CHANGES

In the late seventies, the founders and staff of the Naropa Institute struggled to define their relationship with the city and people of Boulder. As Naropa was trying to get its bearings as an academic institution, the attitudes of Boulderites as well as those of many Americans towards sixties idealism and alternative religions were changing. New “hip” urban capitalists and lifestyle liberals in Boulder desired to weave Boulder liberalism into the political and commercial arena, forsaking those who adhered to the hippie lifestyle and far counter-culture. Trungpa desired that Naropa also cast off its hippie roots and make itself and its leaders more attractive to the new lifestyle liberals and “hip” capitalists. Although Allen Ginsberg and Anne Waldman would participate in a popular demonstration against the Rocky Flats nuclear arms factory, they would increasingly re-direct their energies towards individual spiritual pursuits as taste for sixties-style revolution decreased throughout the country. Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman and other Naropa Institute associates also struggled to defend Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche from fellow poets and the Boulder mainstream press when he exhibited disturbing behavior akin to an abusive cult leader.

In rebelling against the trappings of his original spiritual vocation, Trungpa adopted a new Western lifestyle and dress that at times could be quite conservative and conformist by Western standards. He insisted that his closest disciples dress conservatively and encouraged them to live well, even as he lived lavishly. Trungpa even convinced Allen Ginsberg, a quintessential counter-culture icon, to adopt a mainstream wardrobe. The fashion breakthrough occurred while shopping one day at a Salvation Army store in Boulder. After Trungpa simply suggested that he try on white shirts instead of black ones, Ginsberg bought twenty white shirts.[76] Almost instantly Ginsberg noticed that in his new attire "people were less scared of me."[77] Soon his wardrobe included suits, and even tuxedoes. This simple gesture reflected a profound change occurring within the main student and faculty body of the institute.

Trungpa's concern for the lifestyle choices of his adherents served the Naropa community well given the deeply contested social and political climate of Boulder in the seventies. The transformation of Boulder from a quiet conservative university town into a bastion of liberalism and counterculture had not been smooth. By 1970 three substrata of postwar Boulder society found themselves at odds over the character of their community. Boulder's

[76] Clark, 21.

[77] Ibid.

University Hill neighborhood embodied the struggle between conservatives, lifestyle liberals and hippies. Entrenched conservative merchants on the Hill deeply distained the influx of hippies accumulating in Boulder since the late sixties. While they disdained hippies for the latter's rejection of mainstream American society, they were more concerned that the hippie's presence on the Hill decreased sales and frightened away respectable, paying customers. Their campaign to drive unruly, obnoxious hippies off the Hill galvanized other conservative community organizations to advocate legislation to ban hippies and transients from other public spaces, most notably Boulder's Central Park. The park had become unsanitary due to the hippies using Boulder Creek, which runs through the park, as a source of bathing, waste and drinking water. Local merchants worsened the problem as they refused to let hippies use their bathrooms.[78]

Boulder's liberal lifestyle oriented politicians, such as city manager Ted Tedesco, and "hip" entrepreneurs favored mutual toleration and

[78] For more information about the social transformation of Boulder from the 1950s to the 1970s, read Amy L.Scott's dissertation, *Remaking Urban in the American West: Lifestyle Politics, Micropolitan Urbanism, and Hip Capitalism in Boulder Colorado, 1958-1978.* (The University of New Mexico, Albuquerque NM, 2007). Scott uses Boulder as an example of the influence of coalitions of liberal communities including classic mainstream liberals, radical New Left politicians and newly emerged "lifestyle" liberals and "hip" capitalists in reshaping postwar Western cities in the United States. In her dissertation, Scott demonstrates how lifestyle liberals, managed to shape Boulder's commitment to lifestyle diversity and environmental politics by winning elections and gaining control of city planning agencies. (p. 108-115)

understanding of the needs of hippies and transients. Despite his more lenient rhetoric, Tedesco found himself at the mercy of conservative Boulderites who favored running hippies out of town.[79] Many liberal politicians and entrepreneurs acknowledged that conservative Boulderites had legitimate grievances about the transient problem, though they made clear distinctions between "peaceful flower children" and "hardcore," violent, drug-abusing hippies.

Rampant drug use, drug dealing and the violence that accompanied such activities united liberals and conservatives against the "hard-core" hippies and transients. Boulder liberals felt these elements of the hippie lifestyle were destroying the counterculture ideal. Worst of all were the violent anarchist radicals and drug gangs formed out of hippie collective communities, most embodied by the Serenity, Tranquility and Peace Family. Commonly referred to as the STP Family, they were one of many groups who created an underground drug economy in Boulder. [80]

Boulder city officials and business people, liberal and conservative alike, found common ground on the rise of the hippie drug-gangs. They adopted stricter law enforcement ordinances and even established a permanent police sub-station on the Hill. In May 1971 a three-day riot

[79] Scott, 119-120.

[80] Ibid, 124-128.

erupted on the Hill out of a fist-fight between a street person and a police officer. This event and its subsequent damage to Hill property further polarized the division of those who championed the full-blown counterculture revolution, those who wanted to erase its stamp on the community, and those liberals who relied on the established political system. Even city council members like Tim Fuller, who was a "hip" capitalist and gay rights activist, felt that the counterculture had to reach maturity and embrace civic society.[81]

As more liberal politicians and "hip" capitalists distinguished themselves from the hardcore hippies and transients, they earned less scorn and criticism of their lifestyle from conservative Boulderites. This protected fraternity also included Chogyam Trungpa, Allen Ginsberg, Ann Waldman and the Naropa community.[82] In turn, the common profile of the rank and file of Chogyam Trungpa's adherents changed as well. Unlike those wilderness years in Vermont, fewer "freaks" and commune dwellers attended either the Naropa Institute or Trungpa's other meditation venues. By the late 1970s, followers, students and faculty members were more likely to be prosperous white middle-class Americans who were as career-minded as they were spiritually minded. In associating more with the lifestyle liberals, the presence of new Buddhist practitioners was more acceptable and more palatable for

[81] Scott, 134-143.

[82] Ibid, 134.

mainstream Boulderites.[83] The classless society that Gary Snyder and other Beat writers and their adherents dreamed would prevail over mainstream was still just that, a dream.

Nevertheless, Boulder's fresh class of citizens demonstrated that returning to mainstream society did not necessarily mean capitulation to old status quo. If there was anything that provoked sufficient outrage to their sensibilities and concerns they knew how to revive their tactics of the sixties. One such outrage could be found just eight miles south. Perhaps no other establishment in Colorado symbolized all things anathema to the New Left, Naropa Beats and the fledgling environmentalist movement than the Rocky Flats Nuclear Plant. Established in 1953, shortly after detonation of the first hydrogen bomb, the Rocky Flats facility specialized in the production of components for nuclear weapons, especially plutonium triggers. Managed now by the Dow Chemical Company, the Rocky Flats facility supplied much of the nation's Cold War nuclear arsenal. As the plant expanded in its first two decades, nuclear waste contamination increased. Doctor John Cobb, a Quaker physician and later activist conducted a study on behalf of the Environmental Protection Agency regarding the amount of plutonium in human tissue belonging to people living near Rocky Flats. In autopsies done

[83] Sandra Bell, “Crazy Wisdom,” Charisma, and the Transmission of Buddhism in the United States” Nova *Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 2, No. 1(October 1998), 62.

on 450 subjects, Cobb found substantial amounts of weapons-grade plutonium 239 in the lungs and livers of Rocky Flats workers and nearby denizens.[84]

While the Beat generation writers and poets shared a general abhorrence for both the prospects of armed nuclear conflict as well as the potential environmental devastation that would follow either nuclear war or disposal of nuclear waste, the faculty of the School of Disembodied Poetics, particularly Anne Waldman, was motivated all the more poignantly by concerns specific to their Colorado residency. Waldman's involvement with Rocky Flats sprung from a visit to a nearby ranch with her son. The rancher showed her deformed animals that had been born near the Rocky Flats site.[85] This prompted here and Ginsberg to join the growing Rocky Flats Action Force.

The Rocky Flats Action Force was formed in 1974 by a potent coalition dedicated to shutting down this military-industrial complex. Among the group were Colorado environmentalists; medical and health officials, such as Doctor

[84] Dr. John (Jock) Cobb, interviewed and filmed by Hannah Nordhaus, The Maria Rogers Oral History Program, December 24 2003 and February 12, 2004 (accessed November 4, 2011) http://www.boulderlibrary.org/oralhistory/OH1180v. For more information on the various aspects of the history of the Rocky Flats Nuclear Facility, see the Rocky Flats Oral History Collection compiled by the Rocky Flats Cold War Museum the Boulder Public Library as part of the Maria Rogers Oral History Program.

[85] Rocky Flats Activists, October 28, 2006.

John Cobb; and victims of health defects due to radioactive poisoning including farmers who had lost animals to malignant radioactive mutations. As the movement against Rocky Flats grew, they were joined by national dissident figures such as the Beat poets and Daniel Ellsburg, the whistleblower of the Pentagon Papers. Demonstrations at the site grew reminiscent of antiwar protests of the sixties. The most substantial action began in the summer of 1978 when sixty protesters were arrested for obstructing railway tracks leading to the plant.[86] During the course of the protests, Allen Ginsberg, Anne Waldman and other Naropa Beats sat on the railways. They were arrested along with 286 other protesters including Daniel Ellsberg in 1979.[87] Ginsberg and Waldman commemorated the protests in their poetry. The most famous of poems composed during these events is Allen Ginsberg's Plutonian Ode which directly mentions Rocky Flats in several verses:

> *The Bar surveys Plutonian history from midnight*
> *lit with Mercury Vapor streetlamps till in dawn's early light*
> *he contemplates a tranquil politic spaced out between*
> *Nations' thought-forms proliferating bureaucratic*
> *& horrific arm'd, Satanic industries projected sudden*
> *with Five Hundred Billion Dollar Strength*
> *around the world same time this text is set in Boulder,*
> *Colorado before front range of Rocky Mountains*
> *twelve miles north of Rocky Flats Nuclear Facility in*

[86] Rocky Flats Activists, October 28, 2006 http://www.boulderlibrary.org/oralhistory/ OH1530.

[87] Ibid.

United States of North America, Western Hemisphere
of planet Earth six months and fourteen days around our Solar System in a Spiral Galaxy
the local year after Dominion of the last God nineteen hundred seventy eight
Completed as yellow hazed dawn clouds brighten East, Denver city white below
Blue sky transparent rising empty deep & spacious to a morning star high over the balcony
above some autos sat with wheels to curb downhill from Flatiron's jagged pine ridge,
sunlit mountain meadows sloped to rust-red sandstone cliffs above brick townhouse roofs
as sparrows waked whistling through Marine Street's summer green leafed trees.[88]

Chogyam Trungpa was absent from the protests. His rejection of social protest was symptomatic of collective disenchantment with the legacy of the sixties social revolutions. Trungpa said although he admired his friend and student Ginsberg's poetry, he felt that Ginsberg's poems regarding the Vietnam War and other American crises contributed to the climate of discontent.[89] Trungpa believed that meditation rather than poetry and individual fulfillment rather than social provocation were better responses to America's ills.[90] In his landmark study, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community,* Robert D. Putnam identifies the 1970s as

[88] Allen Ginsberg, "Plutonian Ode." *Collected Poems: 1947-1997.* HarperCollins, New York: 2007. Pp. 712-713. For information about the symbolism in "Plutonian Ode," read the notes on pp.803-805 in *Allen Ginsberg: Collected Poems: 1947-1997.*

[89] Stephen A. Kent, *From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversions in the late Vietnam War era,* Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001, 178.

[90] Ibid.

the point in twentieth century American history where civic and community engagement among the general populous declines significantly. Putnam argues that a number of complex factors affected civic disengagement in the postwar era, the most important being generational change. The Boomer generation cultivated distaste for political involvement in the wake of the Vietnam War, the King and Kennedy assassinations, and the Watergate scandal. This alienation was coupled with more individualistic tendencies and pursuits of the Boomers meant less engagement in government, religion and American communal life in general than all previous generations.[91] Although grassroots activism would continue and affect social change, whether from liberal environmentalist groups or Evangelical Christians, it would never achieve the mass movements that defined the sixties.[92] Even some of the most ardent devotees of social revolution began to waver.

---

[91] Robert D. Putnam. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* Simon & Schuster Paperbacks. New York: 2000. Pp. 257-259, 283-284.For more information about the decline of civic engagement in American society from the postwar era into the end of the Twentieth Century, read Robert D. Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* Putnam's other major factors affecting Postwar civic disengagement including financial pressures in the wake of inflation after the Vietnam War and the oil shocks of the 1970s, mass suburbanization and especially the advent of television as a privatized entertainment venue compared to the more communal act of going to the theatre or the cinema.

[92] Ibid, 153-161. Putnam notes also that even if grassroots environmental movements or even groups such as the National Rifle Association have popular support, they have difficulty cultivating membership, participation and social capital from supporters. He also notes that conservative grassroots vitality is stronger than among liberals, especially from religious conservatives.

Stephen A. Kent, author of From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversion in the Late Vietnam War Era, notes the significance of the sequence of events that unfolded in the United States and elsewhere in the world in the late 1960s and early 1970s as factors contributing to increased membership in new religious movements. The primary example Kent uses is Rennie Davis, one of the Chicago Seven, who became an avid devotee of the Divine Light Mission, a new religious movement founded by the Indian guru, Maharaj Ji. According to Kent's research, many New Left radicals such as Davis felt overcome with frustration, fear and despair at the failure of their revolution. They witnessed events and social trends which convinced them that their country was headed into an inescapable cycle of violence. With the 1968 election of Richard Nixon came expansion of the Vietnam War into Laos and Cambodia. New Left liberals grieved the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. They lamented the prevalence of figures such as Stokely Carmichael and organizations such as the Black Panthers who advocated violent resistance in the cause of civil rights. Their ultimate moment of despair was the gunning down of anti-war activists at Kent State University in 1972. The tragedy at Kent State, coupled with the subsequent official withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam in 1973 and the collapse of the South Vietnamese state in 1975, left Rennie Davis and other like-minded activists in a sad state of

limbo now that their ideals had presumably failed and their primary cause, the Vietnam War was over.[93]

Kent argues that the shift from politics to religion was a coping mechanism for the radicals suffering from the paradox of the end of the war without their social revolution. However, the shift did not need to be some shallow withdrawal from society in favor of self-indulgent spiritual fulfillment. Kent also argues that for many of the New Left acolytes, their conversions were a means of changing the primary focus of discontent from society to the individual. By first focusing on their own self-improvement and, hopefully, inspiring other converts to join and purify themselves, the revolution would happen through its own accord.[94] According to Kent, this is a typical path for unfulfilled social movements to take by projecting "the achievement of their defeated goals into the apocalyptic future."[95] The problem was that there was no guarantee that these new religions would fully accommodate their radical belief system.

---

[93] Stephen A. Kent, *From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversions in the late Vietnam War Era,(*Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 32-37. For more information on new religious conversions stemming from Sixties radicalism, read Stephen Kent's *From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversions in the late Vietnam War Era.* His work focuses on several new religious movements including Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's organizations. Other examples included are the Hare Krishnas, the Christian World Liberation Front and L. Ron Hubbard's Church of Scientology.

[94] Ibid, 41-42.

[95] Ibid.

These conversions from political radicalism to religion could deviate in strange directions. Many radicals joined Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church. This was an especially odd choice considering the organization's virulent anticommunism and unwavering support of President Nixon.[96] The conversion of many radicals to Evangelical Christian groups, such as the Christian World Liberation Front and the Children of God, also seemed strange. New converts forged a strong identification with Jesus as a long-haired revolutionary contrary to the conservative nation-supporting Jesus of the mainstream churches.[97] Conversion was not without its risks. Even though the new radical converts may have found spiritual enlightenment, their enchantment with their newly found organizations often did not last.

Over time, new radical converts learned that these organizations or their charismatic leaders expressed devotion to highly rigid dogmatic principles advocating racism, sexism, belief in a millennial apocalypse and authoritarian rule. More often than not it was their more steadfast New Left associates and dissenters in arms who first expressed dismay and horror at the path taken by their friends, leaders and icons.[98] Some converts such as William S. Burroughs recognized what seemed to him as traits of fascism

[96] Kent, 115-116.

[97] Ibid, 149.

[98] Ibid, 151-152.

within the Church of Scientology which he had adhered to since the early seventies. Disillusioned with its system of ethics and punishment and its blanket attack on psychiatry, Burroughs left and became one of Scientology's harshest critics, staying true to his lifelong anti-authoritarianism.[99]. Defending new religious movements and their charismatic leaders was a risky business as the more dubious side of certain new religious movements became apparent.

Beginning in 1977, New Left artists and, later, the Boulder mainstream press brought the Naropa Institute to task for inconsistency with liberal values and more importantly the egregious behavior of its charismatic founder. In April 1977 Ishmael Reed, one of the most esteemed Black American poets of his generation, came to Boulder to observe the new poetry "renaissance" that was budding in the Rockies. He wrote his reflections on Boulder and Naropa a year later in an article for the *Black American Literary Forum.* When Reed left Boulder, he was not awestruck and enlightened but deeply skeptical. The Naropa presence disturbed him. Reed was particularly skeptical of the claim that Boulder represented a new revolution in poetry.[100] Along with fellow visiting Bay Area poets, David Meltzer and Bob Callahan, he felt that Naropa represented a fad, or as Callahan put it "part of a 200 year old American

[99] Kent, 173-177.

[100] Ishmael Reed, "American Poetry: A Buddhist Take-over?," *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring, 1978), 8.

tradition 'the dude ranch.'"[101] By dude ranch the poets meant that Naropa was merely a retreat for rich cultured East Coast tourists pretending they represent some local creative tradition. This notion resonated especially with Reed. Despite the presence of renowned native Hispanic poets in Boulder, notably Corky Gonzalez and Arturo Rodriguez, not a single Hispanic poet was mentioned when he interviewed the poets of Naropa. If the guest artists and poets from the East Coast were idealistic tourists at Trungpa's dude ranch, then the teachers were the ranch hands; seasoned, battered and all too aware of the ranch's harsh realities. Reed found out that a teacher's average salary at Naropa was about $ 200 a week.[102]

This greatly contrasted with Chogyam Trungpa's opulent lifestyle. He dubbed his residence at 550 Mapleton Street the Kalapa Court. The Rinpoche lived at the court with his wife, Diana Mukpo, and his young son, Gesar Mukpo. Students, required to wear English butler and maid uniforms, cared for the family. These students received no salary but were expected to make monetary contributions to Trungpa's organizations. Diana Mukpo, an avid equestrian, spent two years at the elite Spanish Riding School in Vienna,

[101] Reed, 8.

[102] Ibid, 5.

Austria.[103] Trungpa also had an elder son, Sakyong Mipham, who was the child of a consort nun named Lady Kunchok Palden in India. When he was seven years old he studied with his father and eventually became the successor to the Vajradhatu Organization (renamed Shambhala).[104] Outside of his marital life, the Rinpoche continued to consort with female students. Remarkably he never kept these relationships secret, not even to his wife.[105] Guarding the Rinpoche were Trungpa's Vajra Guards, a pseudo-paramilitary cadre described by some as a bully squad.[106]

David Meltzer and Bob Callahan criticized the Trungpa's corporate merchandizing. Bob Callahan, who was once the Rinpoche's host in San Francisco, noted that he no longer associated with the guru because the practice of charging fifty dollars a ticket for transcendental meditation went against Callahan's communalistic principles. Simon Ortiz, a Native American poet, told Reed that he wondered if the CIA was actually behind Naropa. Ortiz

---

[103] Lady Diana Mukpo with Carolyn Rose Gimian. "The Mapleton Court.": An Excerpt from *Dragon Thunder: My Life with Chogyam Trungpa* Chronicles of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. http://www.chronicleproject.com/stories_61.html9 (accessed March 25, 2012).

[104]Ted Rose, "Sakyong Mipham: King of His World," *Beliefnet*. November 3, 2005 http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Buddhism/2005/11/Sakyong-Mipham-King-Of-His-World.aspx (accessed on April 24, 2012).

[105] Steve Silberman, "Married to the Guru," *Shambhala Sun*, November 2006. http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2998&Itemid=0 (accessed July 24, 2011).

[106] Reed, 5.

believed that declaring any given location as the center of American poetry was a conspiracy to deprive ethnic minorities and lower-class people of art.[107]

Of all the oddities Reed and his poet companions witnessed in Boulder, perhaps none was as striking or as disappointing as Allen Ginsberg's complete and near-unwavering deference to his guru. Ginsberg had said that Trungpa was responsible for bringing forth "a practical, visible, programmatic practice of egolessness and provided a path for other people to walk on."[108] Reed was relieved that Burroughs, although on friendly terms with Trungpa, was not as sycophantic as Ginsberg and kept a distance from Trungpa's brand of Buddhism. Burrough's take on Buddhism and writing was "show me a good Buddhist novelist."[109]

Ginsberg's poet colleagues brought him to task for defending his mentor after Trungpa committed an egregious physical assault on one of their fellow poets. In 1975, William Stanley Merwin, an esteemed poet who had become peace activist during the sixties, requested permission for him and his Native Hawaiian girlfriend, Dana Naone, to attend Trungpa's annual Vajra meditation seminary. Trungpa accepted Merwin's request and his admission fee. Merwin and Naone made their way to the seminary which was held at a

[107] Reed, 6-9.

[108] Ibid, 10.

[109] Reed, 7.

remote ski lodge in the resort town of Snowmass near Aspen, Colorado.[110] Merwin, like Ginsberg, was a committed pacifist and a practicing Buddhist. As soon as Merwin and Naone arrived in Snowmass, however, he realized that Tantric Buddhist practice was not the Buddhism that he had come to embrace.[111]

Merwin's refusal to comply with the meditations soured his relationship with Trungpa. In particular Merwin took issue with reading traditional Tibetan Tantric poetry that praised fierce blood-drinking deities. According to Merwin and Naone, the trouble began when Chogyam Trungpa entered the party in a drunken state. He stripped naked, danced and ordered selected attendees to do likewise. Merwin and Naone refused to do so. The Vajra guards then wrestled the already traumatized couple to the floor, and stripped them naked, much to the Rinpoche's delight.[112]

The morning after the bizarre festivities, Merwin and Naone requested an interview with Trungpa. The Rinpoche did not apologize for his conduct and urged the couple to stay on for more Tantric exercises. Oddly enough, Merwin and Naone stayed for three more weeks of training and then left not

---

[110] Clark, 22.

[111] Paul L. Berman, "Buddhagate: The Trashing of Allen Ginsberg," *The Village Voice*, July 23-29, 37.

[112] Clark, 22-24.

willing to face anymore surprises from the Rinpoche.[113] Like melt water on the Continental Divide, Merwin's horrific story began to trickle down the slopes of the Rockies.

Ginsberg, who had received only sketchy details about what happened at Snowmass, grew fearful of losing a $4,000 grant to the Kerouac School from the National Endowment of the Arts. He contacted Merwin and asked him to tell the NEA that there was no connection between Trungpa's behavior and the Kerouac School. During a poetry reading in Boulder, visiting poet Robert Bly attacked Ginsberg for "sacrificing the community of poets for his teacher" and proclaimed the doom of the Kerouac School.[114] In the wake of the heated discourse between Ginsberg and Bly, Naropa never received the grant from the NEA.

Eager to preserve an incoming grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for $35,000, Ginsberg took it upon himself to prevent the Merwin story from spreading. His efforts came to naught. In that summer of 1977, Ginsberg made an ill-fated decision to invite Ed Sanders to teach poetry at the Kerouac School. Sanders was the pioneer of "investigative poetics," a type of poetry designed to interpret historical facts and distinguish them from historical

[113] Berman, 37.

[114] Clark, 26.

myths or lies.[115] Sanders had made a name for himself and his investigative poetry as a witness at the Chicago Seven trial in 1968. He also investigated the Manson Family Murders in 1971.[116]

Given his specialty as an investigator, Sanders was certainly one of the worst guests Ginsberg could have invited to the institute. For his class on investigative poetics, Sanders invited the students to pick any subject they wished to apply his method. Naturally, the students picked the Merwin Incident. A class report exhumed the incident from testimonies given by almost all the principal actors except for Trungpa. Ed Dorn, another celebrated poet and a professor of English literature at the University of Colorado, copied and distributed Sanders' class account quietly throughout Boulder. There was even a copy in the Naropa Institute's library that later disappeared. Ginsberg's hopes of plugging leaks on the Merwin Incident had failed miserably as the Sanders' Class Report made its way across the country. Much to Ginsberg's dismay, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, his friend, fellow poet and the proprietor of City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, requested a copy of the report. Several publications across the country appealed to Sanders for copies of his investigation into the Naropa Institute, now titled,

---

[115] Clark, 26-27.

[116] Matt Fink, "Ed Sanders: The Last Radical," *Paste Magazine.com,* September 19, 2003, http://www.pastemagazine.com/writers/matt-fink.html?p=3 (accessed December 7, 2011).

The Party: A Chronological Perspective on a Confrontation at a Buddhist Seminary.[117] One local publication, *The Boulder Monthly,* made one of the most serious proposals to run the piece. Especially interested in either running the piece or conducting his own investigation was the *Boulder Monthly's* senior writer, Tom Clark.

The autumn of 1978 was the autumn of discontent within the Naropa Institute, and for Boulderites who had a score, personal or otherwise, to settle with Chogyam Trungpa. Ed Dorn and Ed Sanders were under pressure regarding the circulation of Sanders' *The Party.* Ann Waldman was very much irritated by Sanders' decision to let Dorn circulate the class report. On the other end of the spectrum, Sanders felt under increasing pressure by his students to publish *The Party.* Sanders' conscience was also troubled at the possibility of falling out with his friends and fellow poets at the institute. He still personally loved the communal atmosphere of Naropa where writers could receive "an almost free summer in a beautiful context whatever the underpinnings of "Trungpaic hype and moolahocracy."[118]

Meanwhile in the greater Boulder community, Tom Clark of the *Boulder Monthly* conversed with the acclaimed experimental film maker and University

[117] Clark, 27. For more information about what became known as the Naropa Poetry Wars, read Tom Clark, *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars.* Santa Barbara, CA; Cadmus Editions, 1980..

[118] Clark, 28-29.

of Colorado professor, Stan Brakhage. Brakhage informed Clark that in 1977 he was asked to showcase his films for a benefit to improve the salaries of Naropa teachers. Brakhage agreed to do so only on the condition that the proceeds go to the poets and not "to buy a golden pillow to grace the buttocks of the guru."[119] He showed his films at the benefit but later found that not a single cent of $200,000 made it to the poets. Instead it had gone to a New York public relations consultant working on a PR campaign for Chogyam Trungpa.[120] Meanwhile, an entirely unrelated but devastating tragedy was unfolding in the jungles of South America.

On November 18, 1978 the world received news of a horrifying mass suicide of 918 men, women and children at Jonestown in Guyana. The fact that the members of the People's Temple were lulled by the charismatic and despotic Reverend Jim Jones, promising them a utopic dream world, made the happenings even more tragic. The story of Jim Jones' descent into madness and despotism also invoked suspicion in the American collective mindset towards a number of founders of new religious movements in the United States, including Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche.[121]

---

[119] Clark, 29.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Ibid, 29-30.

From the mid-1970s into the 1980s, the general climate of tolerance towards new religious movements degenerated into suspicion and hostility. Legitimate grievances mounted as public awareness grew of the inner workings of some movements. Jonestown was the most egregious and tragic result of the depravity of a charismatic new religious leader. However, it was not the only deplorable action sanctified within a new religious movement or as they pejoratively began to be called, cults. David Berg, leader of the Children of God, gained infamy by twisting feminist rhetoric so that new female converts could become sexually submissive to his organization's male hierarchy.[122] Many children who grew up in the Hare Krishna movement later admitted to being sexually abused by its most prominent gurus.[123] According to George D. Chryssides, a scholar of new religious movements at the University of Wolverhampton, England, these outrages fueled a growing anti-cult movement in the United States and elsewhere in the Western world. New

[122] Kent, 163-165.

[123] Ibid, 186-187.

religious movements could now be infiltrated by professional de-programmers and face severe scrutiny from the law.[124]

The Merwin Incident coupled with the nationwide trauma of Jonestown created confusion and unease at the Naropa Institute. The founders and core faculty all knew that there was no valid comparison between the Rinpoche and Jim Jones. As for the casual students, however, many of them were not so certain. In December, Ed Sanders reported that his investigative poetics class again voted overwhelmingly in favor of publishing his account of the Merwin incident. Many students felt that in doing so they might prevent their own impending Jonestown.[125]

Sam Maddox, an editor with *Boulder Monthly,* stated that the conflict between Merwin and Trungpa was not a simple brawl but the subject of great importance and implication to the American Buddhist community and the American intelligentsia regarding "tyranny and abuse within the blind homage of the enlightenment movement."[126] Sanders finally accepted Clark and

---

[124] George D. Chryssides, "The Anti-Cult Movement." *New Religions A Guide: New Religious Movements Sects and Alternative Spirituality,* ed. Christopher Partridge (New York: Oxford University Press 2004),75-75. Chryssides is keen to point out that not all anti-cult crusaders worked in an altruistic spirit. Many deprogrammers could be as domineering and abusive as the worst cult leaders, with forced physical abduction and faith braking of cult members. Deprogrammers and cult monitoring organizations could also face criminal charges, or lawsuits from target organizations.

[125] Ibid, 75.

[126] Clark, 48.

Maddox's offer, and published *The Party*. In January 1979 an editorial in *The Boulder Daily Camera* expressed the need for Boulder's Buddhist community to purge itself of the trappings of a cult. The editorial praised Naropa Buddhists for the good they had done in the community by helping individuals work out mental problems or bringing business and commerce to Boulder through Trungpa's Vajradhatu organization. However, the editorial called for an end to blind guru worship, especially gurus who needed the protection of guards, limousines to chauffer them around, and alcohol to induce spiritual wisdom.[127]

Allen Ginsberg took it upon himself to defend his spiritual teacher and redeem their institute. He agreed to an interview with Tom Clark, poet and journalist for the *Boulder Monthly*. The interview did not go well for Ginsberg. When asked about the Merwin incident, Ginsberg reckoned that from what little he knew about the happenings at Snowmass, Merwin and Naone should have better prepared themselves for what they were getting into. Ginsberg also offered his opinion that Trungpa was a better poet than Merwin. Ginsberg then went on to criticize all poets for their hypocrisy and self-righteousness in believing they have "the right to shit on everybody they want to."[128] He cited some of the more egregious transgressions of his Beat

[127] Clark, 47-48.

[128] Ibid, 65.

Generation comrades, including Burroughs' accidental shooting and killing of his wife Joan Vollmer and Gregory Corso's heroin addiction. But Trungpa, Ginsberg continued, "who's been suffering since he was two years to teach the dharma, isn't allowed to wave his frankfurter! And if he does, the poets get real mad that their territory is being invaded!"[129] The March issue of *Boulder Monthly* featuring the interview between Ginsberg and Clark was a hot sell in the city.

Ginsberg, horrified at the extent to which his comments on the subject were published, frantically and continuously contacted Clark in an attempt to revise the interview or to submit the original tapes so he could recant them.[130] Ginsberg also wrote a lengthy letter apologizing to Merwin and Naone particularly for criticizing Merwin's writing and for discussing their situation in public. But he did not apologize for Trungpa's behavior at Snowmass.[131] Despite Ginsberg's earnest pleas for reconciliation, the Poetry Wars, as they came to be known, continued.

In April 1979 Bob Callahan issued a petition titled "An Open Letter to American Artists," calling for the temporary suspension of the Kerouac School

---

[129] Clark, 65.

[130] Ibid, 38.

[131] Allen Ginsberg, The *Letters of Allen Ginsberg,* edited by Bill Morgan, Philadelphia PA: Da Capo Press, 2008, 398-400. Neither the published collection of Ginsberg's letters nor Tom Clark's account mentions Merwin's response to Ginsberg's plea.

until its staff issued a statement of explanation for the alleged assault and humiliation of Merwin and Noane. The petition also called for the disbanding of the Vajra Guards, referred to as the in-house Naropa police force, and an end to any harassment of the press or poets investigating the Snowmass incident.[132] Anne Waldman sent Callahan an angry letter calling for corrections of what she considered gross negligence of the facts of the Snowmass incident. She also feared that due to this misrepresentation of facts, "this may be life and death for the Naropa Institute."[133]

In July 1980 the esteemed political writer Paul L. Berman wrote a piece, titled "Buddhagate: The Trashing of Allen Ginsberg," for *The Village Voice.* While it was a brief investigation into the Merwin affair and a review of the accounts of Sanders and Clark, Berman's article was a plea for sanity and fairness as well. Berman noted that while Clark's interpretation of the Merwin incident was indeed alarming, it also seemed hysterical. Berman lambasted Clark for his tendency to label Ginsberg, Waldman and other Naropa associates as "pods" and derided his suggestion that the Naropa Institute somehow represented a cabal bent on destroying American freedom. This accusation seemed especially absurd considering that while the Poetry Wars

[132] Clark, 51.

[133] Ibid,51- 52.

were going on, Ginsberg was demonstrating outside the Rocky Flats nuclear facility. [134]

Although the Poetry Wars relented, the Boulder mainstream press made it clear that presence of a secretive alternative religious organization headed by a charismatic autocrat who hazes poets was deeply against the values of their community. If Naropa was to remain in Boulder, then it was better that the Rinpoche disassociate himself with the institute. In the following years, Chogyam Trungpa, although still revered for his spiritual leadership, would gradually relinquish his material authority in the Naropa Institute.

[134] Berman, 38.

CHAPTER 5

"LESS CRAZY, MORE WISDOM": NAROPA'S QUEST FOR ACCREDITATION AND A LEGACY

The most important goal of the Naropa Institute during its early years was to achieve accreditation. With accreditation, Naropa students could receive loans from the federal government to further their education in the form of degrees and certificates. Ultimately, it would mean that the ambitious Naropa experiment would be recognized as a legitimate academic institution. For such an unorthodox enterprise, the path to accreditation proved to be dauntingly uphill with a number of surprises and setbacks along the way. A crucial first step was just to be formally considered. In the summer of 1978, representatives of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools visited Naropa and finally awarded the school candidacy status for accreditation.[135]

Although the commission members were willing to recommend Naropa for candidacy, they had a number of serious concerns. There was still no campus Naropa could claim as its own. By 1980 the institute was still renting facilities in downtown Boulder and five other locations within Boulder city

[135] Barbara Dilley, interviewed and filmed by Shirley S. Steele, The Maria Rogers Oral History Program, June 3, 2005, http://boulderlibrary.org/carnegie/index.html (accessed January 13, 2012).

limits. The need to rent facilities set fundamental limits on Naropa's curriculum. For instance, the institute offered no fall terms but did offer winter and spring terms as well as a two-session summer school. Due to its limited year-long programs, Naropa advertised itself as a "senior college," meaning that it only offered junior and senior year courses. The institute did not feature extensive offerings in general education or distribution requirement courses. It assumed that degree students had already completed such studies.[136]

The nature of student life at Naropa was also cause for concern for the visiting North Central delegates. The delegates noticed that enrollment in Naropa's summer program dropped steadily for the summers of 1978 and 1979 from 1138 enrolled students to 751. They speculated that low enrollment affected the limited availability of courses. A Buddhist studies course had only one new student. The theatre program offered only one course for first-year students and one for second-year students. The institute would need to redouble its student recruitment efforts. However, efforts to advertise for additional enrollment were made more difficult due to the lack of a definable student demographic.[137]

---

[136] Dr. Hans H. Jenny and Dr. Frederick J. Crosson, "Report of a Visit to Naropa Institute Boulder CO. February 21-22, 1980." For the Commission on Institutes of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, 1-2.

[137] Jenny and Crosson, 6-7.

The most pressing concern of North Central was Naropa Institute's long-term financial viability. Although it had been successful in finally balancing its budget and was making progress in reducing some of its accumulated deficit, new complications emerged in the institute's financial trajectory by 1980. Its increasing dependence on government funds for financial aid was a concern, yet not particularly unusual for a fledgling educational institution. The most vexing warnings of revenue instability were based on the institute's need to virtually replace its student body year after year. North Central stressed in its 1980 report that future delegations would be better reassured if the Naropa staff were able to provide them with a sufficiently detailed plan of action, complete with documentation describing how and when educational and financial goals should be achieved. Without a well-detailed plan, said the North Central delegates, it was impossible to have any assurance that there would even be a Naropa Institute in years to come.[138]

In the final assessment made by the North Central delegation of 1980, Naropa had certainly made improvements since 1978, but still was nowhere near a steady path towards accreditation. The delegates reported pervasive concerns about the long-term viability and sustainability of the institute. Although Naropa had an active board of directors, an intelligent and

[138] Jenny and Crosson, 8-9.

dedicated administrative staff, and dedicated faculty and students, these assets were overshadowed by the school's institutional weaknesses. Despite the competence of the board of directors, it was not as an important source of financial assistance since there were few public members. Faculty salaries were so low that individual commitment to Naropa was the only motivating factor in continued faculty retention. North Central cited the heavy reliance on one-year certificate students and perilously low enrollment for core divisions. Despite all difficulties that lay ahead for the staff and administration at Naropa, however, North Central believed that the institute's candidate status for accreditation should be continued.[139]

An important, strategic step was to establish an advisory council to infuse a new level of community involvement and management expertise aligned to the institute's goals. In the fall of 1980, the Naropa Institute's newly formed Advisory Council met to discuss how it could fulfill at least some of North Central's recommended steps towards full accreditation. The first orders of business were to assess financial status and facilities. According to council member Jon Landy, the institute still largely depended on grants. Council member Judy Lief addressed the need to increase fundraising for

[139] Jenny and Crosson, 9-13.

Naropa's library which North Central's report had described as grossly inadequate.[140]

The greatest concern at this initial meeting of the Advisory Council was the pressing need to increase enrollment despite understaffing and delays in publishing printed recruitment materials. Regardless of those difficulties, the Admissions Office expressed confidence in their strategy which they mapped out prodigiously. They had accumulated excellent recruitment resources in the form of alumni, former students, core, general and visiting faculty as well as potential opportunity by contacting with other schools. Primary recruitment projects would target junior colleges, usually at college fairs, sister schools and Dharma study groups. Other recruitment venues included high schools; exchange student agencies; organizations, such as the Peace Corps; and some 1,800 other organizations that had requested information from Naropa.[141]

The Admissions Office identified certain academic locales as recruitment targets and defined tactics tailored to its unique attractions and its specific academic departments. The Admissions Office's recruitment proposal advised that the institute should mail brochures and posters with a poem

[140] "Advisory Council Agenda, October 31, 1980. Accessed from the Allen Ginsberg Library May 21, 2011, 3-4.

[141] "Admissions Office Review and Proposal 10/23/80." Accessed from the Allen Ginsberg Library May 21, 2011, 1-2.

about the Disembodied School of Poetics written by Allen Ginsberg. The institute planned special tactics for its dance program by targeting the leaders of dance departments of schools, colleges and universities. This time, dance brochures would include a letter from the program director, Barbara Dilley, inviting dance department heads to attend classes or live lectures and demonstrations. Psychology departments were also prime grounds for dedicated recruitment efforts. As with poetry and dance, the institute would send out posters and brochures to educational department heads with information about Naropa psychology programs and seminars. The strategy stressed that Naropa needed to be featured in handbooks of psychology guidebook programs. Plans for an advertising campaign were presented to the Advisory Council. It called for placement of ads in *Whole Life Times,* one of the most prominent holistic lifestyle magazines in America. *Psychology Today* and *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* were among the scholarly journals indentified for placement of advertising. Another effort would be to research the means to access university counseling centers. In regards to recruiting for the Buddhist studies departments, the Admissions Office did not put as great an emphasis on recruiting tactics because Buddhist studies were already regarded as a more solid and reliable source of new students. [142]

[142] Admissions Office Review, 2-3.

The Admissions Office assessed a timetable for all recruiting projects and related expenses in 1981. No new projects were to begin until January. In addition they would focus on revisiting old recruitment projects that were discarded the previous year and on using the new mailing lists. The timetable showed that winter could be devoted to placing ads in the various publications, such as *Psychology Today* and the Peace Corps newsletter. In spring the emphasis would be inter-institutional contacts. Over the summer the admissions office would work closely with visiting faculty members and consult them in recruiting summer students. Faculty touring, local lectures and performances were a major area of focus in the fall of 1981 and needed to be fully coordinated by the admissions office, the information office and the office of academic affairs. The carefully coordinated information gathering efforts would hopefully result in a wide array of recruitment contacts and activities that could be continued through 1982 and beyond.[143]

At the same meeting on October 31, 1980, the Advisory Council also discussed the outlook for Naropa to establish its own campus, one of the major concerns of the North Central delegation. They considered whether to split the campus between a new location for students and faculty while maintaining rented administration offices on Pearl Street. The projected cost for a split campus would be about $1 million including an additional $50,000

[143] Admissions Office Review, 3-4.

for water installation and $ 50,000 for a leach field. The matter was of such importance that Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche attended this session of the Advisory Council meeting. Trungpa said that the project was too urgent to wait for 1985 or 1986. He thought whatever project the council chose would be an excellent fundraising opportunity. [144]

Council members, John Roeper and Billy McKeever, estimated that designing and building a new facility would cost approximately $1 million dollars. Another consideration that they thought might be prudent was to wait until the institute could spare $2 million dollars to build a unified campus. On the other hand, splitting the campus would cut design costs. The Rinpoche found this option preferable. Otherwise, Trungpa said, "things will snowball and we will get involved further."[145] Dean Judy Lief suggested moving the administration offices to Seventeenth and Pine Street in Boulder. She also suggested a former public school as a possible annex.[146] The campus issue was finally resolved in 1982 when the institute purchased the former Lincoln Elementary School in Boulder and moved into its own campus in 1983.

In 1982 North Central sent another evaluation team to assess Naropa Institute's progress towards full accreditation status. The team noted that

---

[144] Advisory Council Meeting with Vajracarya." October 31 1980. P.1-2.

[145] Ibid, 2.

[146] Ibid.

Naropa certainly had made progress in analyzing its problems and organizing to find solutions to those problems. However, Naropa was a long way from achieving both financial stability and clearly defining an academic program that fulfilled established academic standards. They summarized the most imminent tasks Naropa still needed to address. One was to establish regular payrolls with more competitive salary scales; another was to improve the library, particularly its cramped quarters. Enrollment was extremely low with only about 100 students when North Central visited that year. Naropa's viability looked extremely doubtful. The North Central delegates stressed that while Naropa's current support from donations was dependable, the long term outlook was unclear. Dependence on government support was also deemed to be a dubious future prospect. The North Central delegation concluded that although they recommended that Naropa remain a candidate, it was unrealistic to believe Naropa would be ready for full accreditation in 1984. Even accreditation by 1986 might be a stretch at the very least.[147]

Despite the pessimistic diagnosis for 1984 from North Central, Naropa's staff was determined to meet all challenges. In an admissions office report from June 1983, Peter Hurst, Dean of Admissions, expressed cautious optimism. He said that the admissions office had strengthened its staff and the institute's visibility by expanding its advertising and flyer distribution plan.

[147] "Summary Statement from 1982 NCA Evaluation Team Report."

Hurst was confident that the acquisition of the former Lincoln Elementary School for Naropa's new campus would make the institute more attractive. While Hurst would have liked to invest in enrolling 200 new students, he considered that such a move would be dangerous to the institute's budget.[148] He would give a more conservative estimate a few days later when the Advisory Council met to discuss Naropa's three-year financial plan.

The meeting was held on June 27, 1983. Its record provides insight into a growing sophistication by Naropa in managing its financial affairs. The Advisory Council considered a projected budget of $290,000 including the employment of additional core faculty. Peter Hurst recommended that it was best to recruit 168 new students for the fall of 1984 and 198 students for the fall of 1985. Jon Barbieri, the comptroller for the institute, noted that the budget would have to be adjusted for inflation each year. Barbieri also cautioned that Naropa would need to anticipate borrowing $64,000 for debt repayment for the fiscal year of 1984. The year after would be more difficult due to payroll tax payments.[149]

The Naropa's Advisory Council had clearly become integral management process in re-structuring the institute to meet the North Central

[148] Peter Hurst, "Indications of Future Activity towards Fall 1984 and Beyond?" Admissions Office Report June 24, 1983, 1.

[149] "Three Year Plan" Minutes of Advisory Council Meeting June 27, 1982, 1-2.

Association's standards. Naropa gained new prestige in the greater Boulder community for the prominence it was achieving among influential leaders in the fields of education, psychology and religion. This led to important support for the institute in its pursuit of accreditation.

A series of interfaith dialogue conferences demonstrated how Naropa could bring fresh insight and collaboration into the field of religious study. For two years in 1982 and 1983 the institute sponsored several annual Buddhist-Christian conferences held at the Dzorje Dzong Shrine Center in downtown Boulder. According to Father Daniel J. O'Hanlon, a visiting Jesuit theologian, part of the reason for the conferences was to help Naropa establish a school of meditative and contemplative studies which would examine meditative techniques from Buddhism, Christianity and other major world religions. Many venerated Buddhist monks and gurus including Trungpa conversed with theologians, priests, monks, friars and nuns of the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant (Quaker) traditions on meditation and other comparative spiritual practices.[150]

J. Edward Murray, a former editor of *The Daily Camera,* cited the Buddhist-Christian Conferences as an example of Naropa Institute's positive impact on the Boulder community when he campaigned for its full

[150] Daniel J. O'Hanlon S.J. "The First Naropa Buddhist-Christian Conference." *Buddhist-Christian Studies,* Vol. 3 (1983), pp. 101-117.

accreditation.[151] Having reported on the Buddhist presence in Boulder for six years, Murray wrote to Naropa Vice President Jeremy Hayward expressing his conviction that Boulder Buddhists were "one of the most positive influences in the Boulder community because of their religious philosophy which they teach and practice."[152] The open, amicable dialogue between religious leaders of different faiths suggested that Naropa was an open forum for learning rather than a secretive cultish cabal.

Boulder's medical care community was greatly impressed and greatly appreciated graduates from the Naropa Institute's department of Buddhism and Western psychology. The psychology program, one of Naropa's earliest projects, was based upon the concept of combining Maitri meditation with conventional psychotherapy techniques. Over time, its offerings were expanded. In the Naropa Institute course catalog listings for 1983-1985, the psychology department offered a Master's Intern program directed toward careers in medical professions such as alcohol and drug abuse counseling, in-patient and out-patient care.[153] Dr. Robert March, a director at the Mental Health Center of Boulder County, also wrote in support of Naropa's

[151] J. Edward Murray to Dr. Jeremy Hayward, December 22, 1983

[152] Ibid.

[153] Naropa Institute Course Catalogue, The Naropa Institute. 1983-1985. 19, http://www.naropa.edu/naropalibrary/documents/Catalog_1983_1985_missingpp1-6.PDF (accessed on April 18, 2012.).

accreditation. March believed that graduates from Naropa did as well if not better than trainees from other programs.[154] March noted that Naropa graduates worked well "with the severely disturbed population."[155]

From Lawrence, Kansas, William S. Burroughs wrote Jeremy Hayward to add his voice to the chorus. Through his teaching experience at Naropa, Burroughs had come to believe that Naropa was a unique institution of learning that offered intellectual, physical and spiritual growth. Burroughs commented on Naropa's backdrop of Buddhist wisdom saying that while inspiring, it "nevertheless does not intrude on artistic and other studies in any doctrinaire way."[156] He also believed that over the years Naropa's presence had been "gracefully integrated into the civic and cultural community of Boulder,"[157] and he hoped with accreditation that it would continue its growth and evolution.[158]

When the NCA visited Naropa in 1984, their assessment proved predictable with one exceptional surprise. In pattern, the delegation's evaluation concluded that the institute was still not ready for full accreditation

---

[154] Robert L. March to Edward Podvoll, November 5, 1983.

[155] Ibid.

[156] William S. Burroughs to Dr. Jeremy Hayward, January 22, 1984.

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid.

and would probably not be ready until 1986 at the earliest. The delegates noted that Naropa had made substantial improvements such as the formation of a funding base, a set of financial plans adequate to its mission and had successfully made fair and accurate information available to persons interested in its programs.[159] Serious problems remained, however, such as the ongoing difficulty regarding low salaries to all personnel. Other financial problems cited in the NCA report were a lack of fringe benefit programs and a failure to meet payroll obligations for three consecutive fiscal years.[160] The exception was that the 1984 North Central delegation raised a concern unique to previous visits. It was wary of Naropa's leadership.

The team's concern with governance stemmed from the fact that Chogyam Trungpa, who was the president of Naropa, was absent for their visit, as was Naropa's vice president. The team believed that the unusual nature of Naropa's leadership derived from Trungpa's other obligations as head of the Nalanda Foundation. The NCA team recommended that the leadership and administration be less informal and that a fully involved faculty take charge of all elements of the campus.[161] Napopa's faculty approached

[159] Maragrette F. Eby, Guillermina Engelbrecht and Glenn A. Niemeyer, "Report of a Visit to Naropa Institute Boulder Colorado, March 12-14, 1984." For the Commission on Institutes of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, p. 5.

[160] Ibid, 24.

[161] Eby, 7-8

this specific criticism with great consternation. In a summary of responses to the NCA visit, Naropa claimed that its staff was not aware that the president had to be present for the delegation.[162] The concerns the NCA had about Trungpa's less-than full involvement were not unfounded as would soon be revealed that year.

Between the years of 1984 and 1986, Chogyam Trungpa gradually relocated the Vajradhatu Organization's headquarters to Halifax, Nova Scotia in Canada. The reasons for this progressive change in administrative location were never fully explained. Marcia Usow, a longtime student of the Rinpoche's, speculated that the negative press coverage of his erratic behavior gave rise to the need to reside in a quieter and more "open-minded" community.[163] In 1985 Trungpa phoned the dance program director, Barbara Dilley, inviting her to become chancellor of Naropa Institute. Dilley, despite having no experience in an academic administrative position, took on her new position wholeheartedly.[164] One of her first acts was to appoint her friend Lucien Wulsin to Naropa's board of directors. Soon thereafter, one of the board's first acts under Dilley's leadership was to formally separate from

[162] "Summary of Naropa Institute's Response to the 1984 NCA Evaluation Report," 1984.

[163] Marcia Usow, interviewed and filmed by Shirley S. Steele, May 18, 23, 2006, The Maria Rogers Oral History Program, http://boulderlibrary.org/carnegie/index.

[164] Barbara Dilley, interviewed and filmed by Shirley S. Steele, The Maria Rogers Oral History Program, June 3, 2005

Vajradhatu. The separation was not out of any animosity between Naropa and its parent organization, but rather financial convenience for the Vajradhatu organization.[165] According to Dilley, it was also the Rinpoche's wish that Naropa be a nonsectarian body. In 1986 Naropa finally achieved full accreditation.

On September 28, 1986 Chogyam Trungpa suffered a fatal cardiac arrest. Although the exact causes of death are not fully known, most who knew him and treated him believe the Rinpoche was done in by injuries from his car accident in Scotland and from long-term alcohol poisoning. Proving that Colorado was still dear to him, he requested that his cremated ashes be returned to the Rocky Mountain Dharma Center in Red Feather Lakes. The center was founded by Trunpga and later renamed the Shambhala Center.[166] It was here that he was honored and memorialized in a manner fitting his status as a Tibetan lama by being interned in reliquary within a stupa. The Great Stupa of Dharmakaya which holds his remains can still be seen at the Shambhala Center. The striking monument stands 108 feet high and is adorned with traditional Tibetan arts and crafts. Despite the traditional Tibetan exterior, the stupa is reinforced with an innovative super-strong concrete

[165] Usow, May 18, 2006.

[166] Jean Torkelson, *Colorado's Sanctuaries, Retreats and Spiritual Places* (Englewood, Colorado: Westcliffe Publishers, 2001).

designed to last for 1,000 years. The Rinpoche's cremated remains are contained in a space-age capsule.[167] In this regard, the stupa is a fitting tribute to a man, who attempted to blend the traditional East with the modern West.

He remains an enigmatic figure. His widow, Diana Mukpo, said that the beliefs and actions of her late spiritual mentor and husband were easy to misunderstand out of context.[168] Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche is still revered by many of his students who feel gratitude towards him as the one who opened their minds to new ways of being. They revere him in spite of his eccentricities which would strike many as provocative, abusive or even lecherous. Many in Boulder and Boulder County praised him for his interfaith dialogue and his contributions to the medical and mental health community. Mukpo believes the great irony of the Rinpoche's tumultuous life was that "difficult as it was, it almost took Rinpoche's death for people to gain a better grasp of his teachings."[169] While it is certainly true that everyone who was a part of Naropa owed much to their guru and his vision, the shape of the

[167] Ross R. Webster, "Building a Movement and a Monument: The Rise of Tibetan Buddhism in America and the Construction of Colorado's Great Stupa," *Colorado Heritage,* March/April 2011, 23-31.

[168] Steve Silberman, "Married to the Guru," *Shambhala Sun*, November 2006.

[169] Ibid.

institute and university was also determined by the abilities and will of all involved.

Ultimately, the historical circumstances that shaped the politics and community of Boulder during the sixties and seventies provided an opportunity for Naropa to evolve into something more than a meditation retreat. The institute's local supporters and detractors as well as the growing liberal entrepreneur community aided in making Naropa more palatable to Boulderites. Finally Naropa's outreach programs proved to many in Boulder that Naropa was not isolated but followed the high aspirations of its post-sixties liberal class in investing in social improvement. In the end, Naropa University may not be a reflection of the mythical kingdom its mentor desired. Undeniably, it is a reflection of the unique nature of the community of Boulder and bears the marks of a tumultuous period of social change in America.

CONCLUSION

Much like Boulder itself, Naropa University's unique character is the result of perseverance and adaptation to social change. In its current state Naropa is the result of structural and cultural compromise that transpired in the pursuit of its long term vitality. In achieving full accreditation in the late 1980s, Naropa's staff successfully transformed their struggling institute into a professionally managed academic institution. However, there was a price to pay. In order for Naropa to survive as an institution and accommodate growth, it became increasingly bureaucratized. Naropa University's response letter to an NCA visit in 2010 illustrated how radically different Naropa University is today from the fledgling institute in 1974. Under the leadership of Stuart C. Lord, Naropa's first Black American president from 2009 to 2011, the university restructured itself into four administrative areas. The executive management team had reorganized into a presidential cabinet comprised of six senior executives. The heads of each administrative division were now vice presidents. Lord implemented these changes in order to satisfy concerns from Naropa's board of trustees over the management of its budget in the wake of the economic recession.[170] Given that the university's founders and

[170] Naropa Institute, "Response to the Higher Learning Commission's 2010 Comprehensive Visit," September 1, 2010, 1-4.

staff had long desired to meet the standards of the NCA, bureaucratization and systemization were a probable outcome.

Regrettably to some, this outcome means that Naropa University is now somewhat removed from its free-form roots. John W. Cobb, the current acting president of Naropa University and a longtime member of its advisory council, lamented that his beloved Naropa was adopting corporate administration mechanisms, including what he regarded as the inhumane layoff of staff members. Cobb hopes that he can restore Naropa's core values in its leadership and regain the trust of its staff and student body.[171] Whether Cobb or his eventual successor can successfully steer Naropa in the direction he wishes remains to be seen.

Nevertheless, much of Naropa's original character prevails despite bureaucratization. Anne Waldman, the sole-surviving founder of Naropa (Allen Ginsberg died April 5, 1997), continues to chair the Kerouac School's summer writing program.[172] The religious studies department at Naropa has expanded its scope considerably. While it still has a strong Buddhist core, faculty members now come from Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Islamic and

[171] Sarah Lipton, "Where East Meets West."*Shambhala Times,* March 15, 2012 http://shambhalatimes.org/2012/03/15/where-east-meets-west/(Accessed on April 25, 2012).

[172] "Life of Leadership," *naropa!Magazine,* Spring 2011, 1, http://www.naropa.edu/news/documents/NaropaSpring11.pdf. (Accessed on April 20, 2012).

tribalist traditions.[173] Their education and interfaith dialogue remain true to Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche's vision that Naropa function as an academic kitchen where different religious traditions can exchange their ideas with one another. Naropa still continues to send outstanding graduates into the fields of psychology and creative arts. Many graduates have devoted themselves to environmental activism, citizen journalism, and humanitarian relief work overseas.[174] In this regard, Naropa functions as it was originally intended. It remains an academic institution for students pursuing an education where spiritual values and the academic curriculum transcend traditional borders, material pursuits or career paths. Naropa's founders and staff managed to create a viable path for individuals seeking to craft a life centered around their own spiritual journey, just as its founder did fifty years ago.

[173] "Religious Studies At the Heart of Naropa University," *naropa!Magazine,* Fall 2009, 12-13. http://www.naropa.edu/news/documents/NaropaSpring11.pdf (Accessed on April 20, 2012).

[174] *Naropa University Alumni E-Newsletter*, Spring 2010 http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs074/1102033976102/archive/1103157741266.html (Accessed on April 26, 2012).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baker, John and Jeremy Hayward. Naropa Institute Status Study Report to The Commission On Higher Education of The North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools. June 1975.

Barrett, Marjorie. “Composer trades music for Shambhala.” *The Rocky Mountain News,* August 3, 1977, pp. 34,38.

Bell, Sandra. “Crazy Wisdom,” Charisma, and the Transmission of Buddhism in the United States.” Nova Religio: *The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (October 1998): 55-75.

Berman, Paul L. "Buddhagate: The Trashing of Allen Ginsberg." *The Village Voice*, July 23-29 1980.

Bevil, Mark. “The West Turns Eastward: Madame Blavatsky and the Transformation of the Occult Tradition.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 62, No. 3 (Autumn, 1994): 747-767.

Burroughs, William S., to Dr. Jeremy Hayward, January 22, 1984.

Bye, Reed.“The Founding Vision of Naropa.” In *Recalling Chogyam Trungpa*, edited by Fabrice Midal, 143-161. Boston MA: Shambhala Publications, 2005.

Candida-Smith, Richard. *Utopia and Dissent: Art, Poetry and Politics in California*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1995.

Chryssides, George D. “The Anti-Cult Movement.” Christopher Partridge ed. *New Religions A Guide: New Religious Movements Sects and Alternative Spiritualities*,edited by hristopher Partridge, 75-76. Oxford University Press: New York, 2004.

Clark, Tom. *The Great Naropa Poetry Wars*. Santa Barbara, CA: Cadmus Editions, 1980.

Cleary, Andrew. "Gisnberg concentrates on Buddhism, blues." *The Rocky Mountain News*, August 3, 1977. pp. 34, 38.

Cobb, John C. Interviewed and filmed by Hannah Nordhaus. The Maria Rogers Oral History Program. December 24 2003 and February 12, 2004. http://nell.boulderlibrary.org/record=b1569201~S8 (accessed November 4, 2011).

Dilley, Barbara. Interviewed and filmed by Shirley S. Steele, June 3, 2005. The Maria Rogers Oral History Program. http://boulderlibrary.org/carnegie/index.html (accessed April 3, 2011).

Eby, Margarette F., Guillermina Engelbrecht and Glenn A. Niemeyer. “Report of a Visit to Naropa Institute Boulder Colorado, March 12-14, 1984.” Commission on Institutes of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. March 1984.

Eric, Jonathan. Interviewed by William Fordham, March 14 2002. The Chronicles Project. http://www.chronicleproject.com/stories_17_b.html (accessed July 15, 2011).

Fink, Matt. “Ed Sanders: The Last Radical.” *PasteMagazine.com*, September 19, 2003. http://www.pastemagazine.com/writers/matt-fink.html?p=3 (Accessed December 7, 2011).

Ginsberg, Allen. *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, edited by Bill Morgan. Philadelphia PA: Da Capo Press, 2008.

Ginsberg, Allen. “Plutonian Ode.” *Collected Poems: 1947-1997*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.

Green, Kenneth. Interviewed by William Fordham 2006. The Chronicles Project. http://www.chronicleproject.com/stories_60.html (accessed July 15, 2011.).

Hayward, Jeremy, Judy Lief, Jon Barbieri, Peter Hurst, J. Astor, et. All. “Three Year Plan” Minutes of Advisory Council Meeting June 27, 1983.

Hurst, Peter. “Admissions Office Review and Proposal 10/23/80.” Advisory Council Agenda. October 31. 1980.

Hurst, Peter.“Indications of Future Activity towards Fall 1984 and Beyond?” Admissions Office Report, June 24, 1983.

Isserman, Maurice and Michael Kazin. *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Jenny , Hans H., Dr. and Dr. Frederick J. Crosson. “Report of a Visit to Naropa Institute Boulder CO. February 21-22, 1980.” For the Commission on Institutes of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, February 1980.

Kent, Stephen A. *From Slogans to Mantras: Social Protest and Religious Conversions in the late Vietnam War Era*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001.

Lief, Judith. Naropa Institute Status Study Report to the Commission on Higher Education of The North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, November 1977.

" Life of Leadership." *Spring 2011*, http://www.naropa.edu/news/documents/NaropaSpring11.pdf (Accessed on April 20, 2012)

Lipton, Sarah. “Where East Meets West.”*Shambhala Times,* March 15, 2012. http://shambhalatimes.org/2012/03/15/where-east-meets-west/(Accessed on April 25, 2012)

March, Robert L. to Edward Podvoll, November 5, 1983

Mukpo, Diana. *Crazy Wisdom.* Boston, MA: Shimbhala Publications, 1991.

Mukpo, Diana with Carolyn Rose Gimian. “The Mapleton Court.”: An Excerpt from *Dragon Thunder: My Life with Chogyam Trungpa.* Chronicles of Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. http://www.chronicleproject.com/stories_61.html (Accessed March 25, 2012).

Naropa Institute, "Response to the Higher Learning Commission’s 2010 Comprehensive Visit," September 1, 2010, 1-4.

Murray, J. Edward to Dr. Jeremy Hayward, December 22, 1983.

Naropa Institute Newsletter. Naropa Institute, September 1977.

Naropa University Alumni E-Newsletter. Spring 2010. http://www.naropa.edu/alumni/events.cfm http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs074/1102033976102/archive/1103157741266.html (Accessed on April 26, 2012).

Nelhaus, Arlene. "Musician Discovers 'Niche' in Boulder." The Denver Post, July 14, 1976, 66.
-"Boulder Innovative Music Capital-Because of Naropa." The Denver Post, August 18, 1976, p. 41.

Noel, Thomas J., & Dan W. Corson. *Boulder County: An Illustrated History*. Boulder, CO: Historic Boulder, Inc., 1999.

O'Hanlon, Daniel J., S.J. "The First Naropa Buddhist-Christian Conference." *Buddhist-Christian Studies,* Vol. 3 (1983), pp. 101-117.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* Simon & Schuster Paperbacks. New York: 2000.

Reed, Ishmael. " American Poetry: A Buddhist Take-over?" *Black American Literature Forum*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Spring, 1978): 3-11.

" Religious Studies At the Heart of Naropa University," *naropa!Magazine,* Fall 2009. http://www.naropa.edu/news/documents/NaropaSpring11.pdf (Accessed on April 20, 2012).

Rocky Flats Activists filmed by Hannah Nordhaus. The Maria Rogers Oral History Program. October 28, 2006 http://www.boulderlibrary.org/oralhistory/ OH1441v (Accessed November 5, 2011).

Rose, Ted. "Sakyong Mipham: King of His World." *Beliefnet*. November 3, 2005. http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Buddhism/2005/11/Sakyong-Mipham-King-Of-His-World.aspx (Accessed on April 24, 2012).

Rossinow, Doug. *The Politics Of Authenticity: Liberalism, Christianity and the New Left in America*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Scott, Amy L. "Remaking Urban in the American West: Lifestyle Politics, Micropolitan Urbanism, and Hip Capitalism in Boulder Colorado, 1958-1978". (Doctoral Dissertation, University of New Mexico, 2007) ProQuest Information and Learning Company. UMI No. 3259313

Silberman, Steve. “Married to the Guru.” *Shambhala Sun*, November 2006. http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2998&Itemid=0 (Accessed July 24, 2011).

Snyder, Gary. “Buddhism and the Coming Revolution.” *Arthur Magazine*, December 25, 2010. http://www.arthurmag.com/2010/12/25/buddhism-and-the-coming-revolution-by-gary-snyder/ (Accessed August 1, 2011.). Originally published in 1969 in Earth House Hold: Technical Notes and Queries to Fellow Dharma Revolutionaries by Gary Snyder.

“Summary of Naropa Institute’s Response to the 1984 NCA Evaluation Report.” Naropa Institute, Boulder CO, July 1984.

“Summary Statement from 1982 NCA Evaluation Team Report.” Commission on Institutes of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, 1982.

Torkelson, Jean. Colorado’s Sanctuaries, Retreats and Spiritual Places. Englewood, CO: Westcliffe Publishers, 2001.

Trungpa, Chogyam*. Born in Tibet*. New York: Brace & World Inc, 1968.

Urban, Hugh L. “The Cult of Ecstasy: Tantrism, the New Age, and the Spiritual Logic of Late Capitalism.” *History of Religions*, Vol. 39 No. 3 (February 2000): 268-304.

Usow, Marcia. Interviewed and filmed by Shirley S. Steele, May 18, 23, 2006. The Maria Rogers Oral History Program, http://boulderlibrary.org/carnegie/index.html (Accessed April 10, 2011).

Vajracarya, Jeremy Hayward, Judy Lief, Billy McKeever, John Roper, Reginald Ray, Jon Barbieri,Peter Hurst & R. Astor. “Advisory Council Meeting With Vajracarya.” Naropa Advisory Council. Boulder, CO: October 31, 1980.

Waldman, Anne, Co-founder of Naropa University. Interview by Ross R. Webster, April 12 2010. Phone.

Webb, Marilyn. “Naropa Institute Colorado’s New Mecca for the Arts.” *Denver Magazine*, October 1977, pp. 34-37, 64-65

Webster, Ross R. "Building a Movement and a Monument: The Rise of Tibetan Buddhism in America and the Construction of Colorado's Great Stupa." *Colorado Heritage*, March/April 2011.