Poetry, Waterboarding, Genocide, Rebranding--from El Colonel's Files for the New Extreme Experimental American Poetry & Arts

These are among the raw materials I have been assembling over the last five years for my ongoing investigative project into the Anarkeyology of The new Extreme Experimental American Poetry & Arts. As a writer what calls to me in these documents is the ways in which one of the major shifts in American "poetics" especially since 9/11/2001, and originating during the Reagan Years has been to amputate the term "avant-garde," leaving one with the "avant" and "post-avant" as expressions associated with what has become the ubiquitous calls for work that is "radical, innovative, transgressive" poetry, poetics and various hybrids of these.

Rebranded as the "avant," the "avant-garde is shorn of its military associations, a rebranding which I find of immense interest and import, and demanding of investigation as it occurs during a decade of ever escalating American Imperialist Wars, Invasions, Occupations, torture, ethnic cleansing and Genocide.

Since 9/11 there has been a slow steady attack on or put-down of "political" poetry, with the consequent elevation so to speak in moral suasion and moral tone used for excusing poetry from the public, political, economic and historical confrontations and contexts of the "times." By being "freed" of such constraints, poetry thins to liberate itself into an unstated realm of "pure, eternal Form." The idea of poetry is to be served as the basis for poetry, poetics and poems, the idea of poetry being that the poem goes beyond the prison house of words and passes into a zone of separated activity in which one is liberated from the narrow concerns of events and finds oneself in, in a sense, a "pastoral" setting "where the deers and the antelope play/and the skies are not cloudy all day." there, poetry meditates on the materials of poetry which have been "sublimed as it were, into a "pure state." There, poetry has nothing to do with politics nor the military evoked by the hoary old term "the avant-garde."

One of the great originators of forms and genres of lyric poetry, Archilocus, was both poet and mercenary soldier. The Greek poet wrote that he had two masters--the God of War and the Muse of Poetry. A bastard son of a servant and her master, Archilocus' social status was a liminal one, finding its equilibrium by serving in the paying armies of various states. He wrote his poetry with gaiety, or anger, or black gallows humor, mixing invective with odes to the soldiers he had known who died al around him, and continually reminded him or his own imminent death.

Archilocus as both poet and soldier, and a poet who was an inventor, an experimenter in relation the poetry of his own time,embodies in one person and body a literal and literary avant-garde. One of his great admirers in contemporary literature was Roberto Bolano, (1953-2003) the late Chilean poet, novelist, short story and essay writer. Bolano's work is often concerned with the intersections of the military and the literary avant-gardes, and Bolano uses these intersections in turn to examine the relationship of poetry with fascism. (He was briefly imprisoned during the early days of the Pinochet regime, put in power by a US backed coup.)For Bolano, the relationship of poetry with fascism is a very close one, one that continually threatens and suppresses any poetics which do not follow its strict and sadistic routines. The character of the aviator-serial killer-poet photographer and cinema cameraman Carlos Wieder in the novella Distant Star (an extended version of the last entry in the anthology/biographies of imaginary poets Nazi Literature in the Americas) is forced to go underground after a demonstration of his vision of the New Chilean Poetry, which combines sky writing with a photographic exhibit of snapshots of tortured and mutilated bodies, some perhaps stil living, which he mounts in a room in his flat for the benefit of a group of young army and air force cadets. While pretending to a student at an avant-garde workshop and creating the New Chilean Poetry, Wider practices when necessary not only "originality" but also plagiarism and and indirect copying, writing mostly under a pseudonym or anonymously.
Many of Wieder's practices are ones recently embraced in various ways by a number of "avant" American Poetry movements - Conceptualism for one. Wieder's use of "impersonality" in writing is found in action in his using various pseudonyms and making anonymous contributions to a curious International Underground made up of vanity publications, Biker Zines, Soccer fan zines, pseudo political tracts and the journals of the French "Society of barbaric Writers." Wieder's increasingly fugitive works are made even more difficult to trace by their appearances in several languages, from Latin and Central American idiocies to a number of European tongues.

Bolano, as the link between Archilocus and Carlos Wieder, narrates Distant Star as poet who has known the elusive serial killer pilot poet from workshops in the now distant past of the days preceding and leading into the Coup of Pinochet’s This is when the rather strange young "amateur" avant garde poet is transformed into the state condoned serial killer who includes among his victims girls from the poetry groups who had been the objects of crushes by the narrator and his friends. Now, years later and living in Spain, the narrator is tracked down by an aging detective who had been decorated during the Allende regime. The ghosts are gathering around the narrator as he goes to work with the detective in identifying Wieder, leading to his excution by the detective.

My own character, featured and narrating many short stories and prose poems of mine, came to me as a voice and face--one in part inspired by a kind of "after effect" of Bolano’s book and characters. El Colonel initially appears to be some kind of fascist psycho in the manner of Wioeder, and on also obsessed with writing. As the stories go on, a quiet different aspect of El Colonel is slowly being brought to light, is slowly emerging, becoming exposed, in the light of his own Unwritten writings and in the light which flows through the high windows in his room or in the outdoors, among battle scenes and scenes of mediation and walking, a ghost who is continually creating the mask that he wears, his role as El Colonel.

Wieder, Bolano, Borges, Shakespeare, Sciascia, Archilocus all are accompanying El Colonel in his strange journey as writer of the Unwritten, of the Literature of the no, and as an asymmetric warfare practitioner--an avant garde warrior-poet and at the same time an actor continually improvising a part for which he only can write the unwritten scripts, as well as direct them and comment on them to himself, representing an audience to his own staging of his plays in which like Shakespeare’s Richard the Third he is both director and prompter as well as protagonist and commentator. This being enacting so many parts and roles among so many ghost and literary imaginary figures-- is also theorizing on Literature primarily of the No and dreaming up plans of attack on his direct enemies and imaginary kidnappings--or are they-of American poets. These poets will be treated in mock Guantanamo prison cells like Guantanamo "enemy combatant detainees' and so hopefully demonstrate what kind of poetry they might write under the same stresses as the Guantanamo poets were subjected to.

El Colonel treats fact and fiction as interchangeable as he does poetry and theater, theater of war and memory, writing and the unwritten, action and death, ghosts and fellow members of his "Heroic Patrol." This is a liminal area El Colonel inhabits, just as he himself is a liminal being. Part of this liminality is the treatment of documents by El Colonel, which, as they are woven together out of materials found in burned out homes, bomb ed and shattered libraries, battered bookstores and bulging private collections begin to create his ironically named Library of Alexandria, a collecting and arranging of the elements-of texts in order to present what he finds exposed among al this writing...

here then are some excerpts from the library of Alexandria which El Colonel has been gradually finding and filing in various stacks around the immense near empty room which he uses as his office and living area when not sleeping... these particular files are but one small section concerning incidents where literature, writing and the unwritten, al begin to cross paths with the areas where Carlos Wieder and Bolano also conducted their investigations, into those areas of torture, genocide, poetry, imprisonment... disappearances and reappearances... al the materials which slowly emerge into the light of day from out of that darkness in which Edgar Poe’s Dupin would sit in order to better see the Purloined Letter to visualize it into appearing
in the plain light of day hidden in plain site/sight/cite—much as though in the darkroom of thought—it slowly emerged into
the light, the foto of an invisible letter hidden there for all to see except those in the light they presume to be illuminating . . .
to be exposed to bright lights and loud music while hooded—or to wear goggles and ear covers which render one blind and
defa for weeks at time—sensory overload sensory deprivation—

Language says a Russian artist is a Fascism not because it censors or silences, but because IT FORCES ONE TO SPEAK-----

Waterboarding is introduced into the Document de la Commission

Our men . . . have killed to exterminate men, women, children, prisoners and captives, active insurgents and suspected
people from lads of 10 up.... Our soldiers have pumped salt water into men to "make them talk," and have taken prisoners
people who held up their hands and peacefully surrendered, and an hour later . . . stood them on a bridge and shot them
down one by one, to drop into the water below and float down, as examples to those who found their bullet-loaded
corpses."; Philadelphia Ledger newspaper in 1901, from its Manila [Philippines] correspondent during the US war with
Spain for the control of the Philippines

According to Amnesty International[9]:

"Detainees have reported being routinely subjected to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment during arrest and
detention. Many have told Amnesty International that they were tortured and ill-treated by US and UK troops
during interrogation. Methods often reported include prolonged sleep deprivation; beatings; prolonged restraint
in painful positions, sometimes combined with exposure to loud music; prolonged hooding; and exposure to bright
lights. Virtually none of the allegations of torture or ill-treatment has been adequately investigated by the
authorities."

On January 12, 1998 the Supreme Court of Israel declined to ban the use of loud music as an interrogation technique.[10]

Today's documents reveal charges that Special Forces beat, burned, and doused eight prisoners with cold water before
sending them into freezing weather conditions. One of the eight prisoners, Jamal Naseer, died in U.S. custody in March
2003. In late 2004, the military opened a criminal investigation into charges of torture at Gardez. Despite numerous witness
statements describing the evidence of torture, the military's investigation concluded that the charges of torture were
unsupported. It also concluded that Naseer's death was the result of a "stomach ailment," even though no autopsy had been
conducted in his case. Documents uncovered today also refer to sodomy committed by prison guards; the victims' identities
are redacted.

(Suddh Pulin, Jeremy Colvin, and Lavonne C. E. (Lavonne Cynthia Evelyn) Leong - The Diabolic Sweetness of Pol Pot -

The Diabolic Sweetness of Pol Pot Soth Polin Translation by Jeremy Colvin and Lavonne Leong

In the beginning was the Word/and the Word was with God/and the Word was God./All things were made by Him/and
without Him nothing was made. The Prologue of St. John

At the time that Pol Pot was teaching me Verlaine, I had not yet learned to distrust sweet things. In 1957, he was my French
teacher, though later he claimed to have been a history teacher, in order not to appear to have been an advocate of the
colonialists' culture. We knew him by the name of Saloth Sar, and nothing he said to us betrayed his engagement in politics -
- until the day in 1962 when he left for the resistance.

I need to revise my memory of that school year: Pol Pot was not just the disciple of Verlaine who, as a good philologue, knew
how to win over his students with his explications de texte: "It rains in my heart as it rains on the city. From whence comes this languor that pierces my heart..." The consequences of the phantasmagoric catastrophe of human judgment that was the Khmer Rouge regime are now widely known, and it is time to take a closer look at the means by which they established themselves. Clearly, there were political and economic causes, but a cultural factor also played an important role, and until now it has been rather...

The woman returned followed by a tall gaunt man, dressed in a faded sarong. He did not look as much like Pol Pot as the brother I had met briefly in Phnom Penh, but the resemblance was still unmistakable.

His name was Loth Sieri, he said, seating himself beside us, and he was the second-oldest of the brothers. Saloth Sar had gone away to Phnom Penh while he was still quite young, and after that they had not seen very much of him. He had gone from school to college in Phnom Penh, and then finally, to Paris. He smiled ruefully. "It was the knowledge he got in Paris that made him what he is," he said.

He had visited them a few times after returning to Cambodia but then he had disappeared and they had never seen him again: it was more than twenty years now since he, Loth Sieri, had set eyes on him. They had been treated no differently from anyone else during the Pol-Pot-time; they had not had the remotest idea that 'Pol Pot' was their brother Sar, born in their house. They only found out afterwards.

Was Saloth Sar born in that very house? I asked. Yes, they said, in the room beside us, right next to veranda.

When he came back from France, I asked, had he ever talked about his life in Paris? What he’d done, who his friends were, what the city was like?

At that moment, with cows lowing in the gathering darkness, the journey to Paris, from that village on the Sen river, seemed an extraordinary odyssey. I found myself very curious to know how he and his brothers had imagined Paris, and their own brother in it. But no. The old man shook his head: Saloth Sar had never talked about France after he came back. Maybe he had shown them some pictures - he couldn’t recall.

Newly Released Government Documents Show Special Forces Used Illegal Interrogation Techniques In Afghanistan

By ACLU

17/04/08 "ACLU" -- -NEW YORK – The American Civil Liberties Union obtained documents today from the Department of Defense confirming the military’s use of unlawful interrogation methods on detainees held in U.S. custody in Afghanistan. The documents from the military’s Criminal Investigation Division (CID), obtained as a result of the ACLU’s Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) lawsuit, include the first on-the-ground reports of torture in Gardez, Afghanistan to be publicly released.

“These documents make it clear that the military was using unlawful interrogation techniques in Afghanistan,” said Amrit Singh, an attorney with the ACLU. “Rather than putting a stop to these systemic abuses, senior officials appear to have turned a blind eye to them.”

Special Operations officers in Gardez admitted to using what are known as Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) techniques, which for decades American service members experienced as training to prepare for the brutal treatment they might face if captured.

Today’s documents reveal charges that Special Forces beat, burned, and doused eight prisoners with cold water before sending them into freezing weather conditions. One of the eight prisoners, Jamal Naseer, died in U.S. custody in March
In late 2004, the military opened a criminal investigation into charges of torture at Gardez. Despite numerous witness statements describing the evidence of torture, the military’s investigation concluded that the charges of torture were unsupported. It also concluded that Naseer’s death was the result of a “stomach ailment,” even though no autopsy had been conducted in his case. Documents uncovered today also refer to sodomy committed by prison guards; the victims’ identities are redacted.

“These documents raise serious questions about the adequacy of the military’s investigations into prisoner abuse,” added Singh.

The ACLU also obtained today a file today related to the death of Muhammad Al Kanan, a prisoner held at Camp Bucca in Iraq. The file reveals that British doctors refused to issue a death certificate for fear of being sued for malpractice: www.aclu.org/pdfs/safefree/20080416/CID_ROI_Bucca.pdf

U Sam Oeur, a captain in the army of the American-backed Government of Gen. Lon Nol in Cambodia who wrote poetry on the side...

“Flight from Misery”

On April 13, 1975, U Sam Oeur, a captain in the army of the American-backed Government of Gen. Lon Nol in Cambodia who wrote poetry on the side, was celebrating the Buddhist New Year at his home near Phnom Penh.

Suddenly, “there were soldiers with heavy guns around my house, coming like flies from every direction,” Mr. U Sam Oeur said in an interview in Washington last week. As shells fell from the sky, Khmer Rouge soldiers under the command of Pol Pot ordered people to evacuate the city. Mr. U Sam Oeur, his 4-year-old son, his wife, pregnant with twins, and mother-in-law wrapped themselves in mats and prepared to die. “We decided to stay and be burned alive,” he said.

Instead, they were sent to the countryside, where they endured four years in the labor camps of the Khmer Rouge, part of a drastic reorganization of society in which as many as two million Cambodians died through execution, disease and starvation. Mr. U Sam Oeur’s wife, son and mother-in-law survived; the twins did not.

Mr. U Sam Oeur, 62, who now lives in Edina, Minn., has written of his time under the Khmer Rouge in a new book, "Sacred Vows," translated by the poet Ken McCullough and published by Coffee House Press last month. Composed of 53 poems, the collection is a retelling of the story of the Cambodian killing fields in poetic form. It is one of the first English translations of a contemporary Cambodian poet’s work. Today at 2 P.M., Mr. U Sam Oeur is to read a selection at the bookstore of the Asia Society at 725 Park Avenue, at 70th Street.

The poems, written in Cambodian with the English translations on the facing pages, evoke the lush, rural culture of Cambodia:

Where water glitters, palm trees dance.
Where egrets and herons flap after fish,
water buffalo charge each other, grunting like giants.

But Cambodia in the 1960’s was caught in the middle of the Vietnam War, which fueled the civil war pitting Lon Nol’s Army against the Khmer Rouge. Mr. U Sam Oeur records the transformation of Cambodia into a Dantesque hell:

No places to hide,
no skies under which to rest;
and the moaning of children
and the cries of mothers
out of blazing fire across the land.

Mallarme’s Divigations & le fait divers

These nine poèmes critiques brought together under the heading ‘Grands faits divers’. As in Divagations as a whole, the implied movement from the generically orthodox to the radical is again accompanied by a movement outwards from the parish of poetry to the wider province of the ‘fait divers.’

The notion of linguistic guardianship thus frames the ‘Grands faits divers’, and the homophonic resonance of this title (‘grands faits, dits vers’) suggests that the salient issues of human social experience are here stated in the form of ‘le vers’, which is to be understood in the broad Mallarméan sense – of heightened, ‘knowing’ linguistic usage – that encompasses both verse and prose and in this case the poème critique. What the papers say (the ‘fait divers’) has been transformed into the ‘great fashionings’ (‘grands faits’) that are the product of ‘Poésie’ or what, on the basis of the word’s etymology, Mallarmé also calls ‘fiction’. The common currency of social and political debate will be pegged to the gold standard of Poetry.

(my emphasis)

At the time that Pol Pot was teaching me Verlaine, I had not yet learned to distrust sweet things. In 1957, he was my French teacher, though later he claimed to have been a history teacher, in order not to appear to have been an advocate of the colonialists’ culture. We knew him by the name of Saloth Sar, and nothing he said to us betrayed his engagement in politics - until the day in 1962 when he left for the resistance.

I need to revise my memory of that school year: Pol Pot was not just the disciple of Verlaine who, as a good philologue, knew how to win over his students with his explications de texte: "It rains in my heart as it rains on the city. From whence comes this languor that pierces my heart..." The consequences of the phantasmagoric catastrophe of human judgment that was the Khmer Rouge regime are now widely known, and it is time to take a closer look at the means by which they established themselves. Clearly, there were political and economic causes, but a cultural factor also played an important role, and until now it has been rather...

I remembered, from David Chandler’s biography, that Pol Pot was very well read as a young man, and knew large tracts of Rimbaud and Verlaine by heart. But I was not surprised somehow, to discover that he had never allowed his family the privilege of imagining.

For Khieu Samphan and Pol Pot, the deaths of Hou Yuon, Hu Nim and the thousands of others who were executed in torture chambers and execution grounds, were not a contradiction but rather a proof of their own idealism and ideological purity. Terror was essential to their exercise of power. It was an integral part not merely of their coercive machinery, but of the moral order on which they built their regime; a part whose best description still lies in the line that Brückner, most prescient of playwrights, gave to Robespierre (a particular hero of Pol Pot’s) - "Virtue is terror, and terror virtue" - words that might well serve as an epitaph for the 20th century . . .

Mr. U Sam Oeur was the son of a prosperous farmer in Svey Rieng Province, which borders on Vietnam. He studied at the School of Arts and Trades in Phnom Penh. He won a scholarship from the Agency for International Development and attended California State University in Los Angeles, graduating in 1965. It was in California that he began writing poetry and caught the eye of a program officer for the Asia Foundation who secured for him a scholarship to the Iowa Writers’ Workshop.
At Iowa in 1966 he met Mr. McCullough, a fellow student who had been a minor-league pitcher in the Pittsburgh Pirates organization. "I was as naive as Sam about poetry," Mr. McCullough said. They became friends and spoke of translating Khmer legends into English together. Mr. U Sam Oeur received his master of fine arts degree from Iowa in 1968 and returned to Cambodia, teaching English in a trade school in Phnom Penh and managing a cannery.

"In 1970, I got a letter from him," said Mr. McCullough. That year, Lon Nol overthrew Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the country's ruler, and Cambodian factions were fighting a raging civil war.

"He was a captain in the army," Mr. McCullough said. "He said there was no point in writing any more because everything was being censored." Prince Sihanouk had aligned himself with the Communist Khmer Rouge, who were gaining control of the countryside.

In 1972 Mr. U Sam Oeur served in the National Assembly, and in 1974 in the Cambodian delegation to the United Nations. When the Khmer Rouge took control the next year they began their brutal reorganization, focusing on soldiers, intellectuals and minority groups. Mr. U Sam Oeur burned his poems and his master's thesis from Iowa out of fear that if they were discovered he would be killed. He headed toward the mountains with his family. But he was drafted into a forced labor camp in Prey Veng Province, where he plowed rice fields and survived by pretending to be illiterate.

THE WORDS CHANGE BUT THE MEANING REMAINS THE SAME
THE PRESIDENT'S POETRY OF REBRANDING:
The President has asked that his spokesmen no longer use the term "global war on terror," but instead "oversees contingency operation," and Secretary of Homeland Security Janet Napolitano recently referred to terrorist attacks as "man-caused disasters."

Poetry Exercises that "double" as the Commands of Propaganda

From "WREADING EXERCISES" by Charles Bernstein

27. Eliminate all personal pronouns or self-reference in a poem.
28. Backwards: Reverse or alter the line sequence of the poem. Next, reverse the word order. Rather than reverse, scramble.
29. Defacement: Alter a "good" poem so as to make it as bad as possible.
30. Negation/Opposites: Negate every phrase or sentence in the poem or in some way substitute opposite words for selected words in the source text: "I went to the beach" becomes "I went to the office"; "I got up" becomes "She sat down"; "I will" become "I will not"; etc. As an alternative, take a poem and change what it says line for line or phrase for phrase; not opposite, just different.
32. Create a set images to accompany the poem, either stanza for stanza or line for line.
33. Typography: Set the poem in several different fonts. Alter the visual layout. Try color. Create a hypertext version, using color, font, background, and image.
34. Elimination: Cut out the second half of sentences or lines.

Obama’s remarkable success offers a clear and prescient 10-point playbook for marketers who want to beat the odds in 2009…

By appealing to both the rational desire for change and the emotional need for hope, Obama presented his brand as a
movement and embraced the notion that former P&G CMO Jim Stengel calls “purpose-based marketing.” As the game gets rougher in 2009 and resources tighter, clarifying your purpose as a brand will be that much more significant. It will help you keep communications on point, your internal team inspired and your target more inclined to cast their vote for your brand.

“I went down on my knees and prayed to Almighty God for light and guidance and one night late it came to me this way. We could not leave (the Philippines) to themselves—they were unfit for self-government—and they would soon have anarchy and misrule over there worse than Spain’s was. There was nothing left for us to do but take them all and educate the Filipinos, and uplift and Christianize them.” - President William McKinley