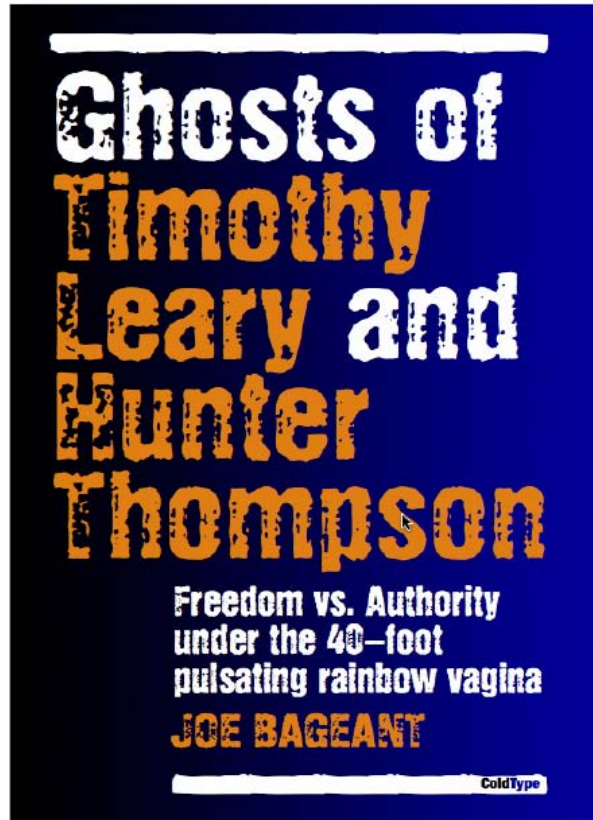


---

**Ghosts of  
Timothy  
Leary and  
Hunter  
Thompson**

**Freedom vs. Authority  
under the 40-foot  
pulsating rainbow vagina**

**JOE BAGEANT**



**Joe Bageant** is the author of the forthcoming book, **Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches from America's Class War** from Random House Crown on working class America, to be released in June, 2007.

A complete archive of his online work, along with the thoughts of many working class Americans on the subject of class may be found at [www.joebageant.com](http://www.joebageant.com).

Feel free to contact him at [joebageant@joebageant.com](mailto:joebageant@joebageant.com)

© Joe Bageant 2007

**ColdType**

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD  
<http://www.coldtype.net>

## JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON

*Everything Americans think they know, they learned from a televised morality play. It's all theater. You root for some good guy and boo some bad guy. You pick your own, but you dance to the tune of the men running the show. It's mind control, pure and simple, and if there is an American immune to it, then he is probably living in a snow cave somewhere in Alaska. – Gypsy Joe Hess (1919-1988), prospector, self-educated philosopher and horse trader*

**IN** my ragged assed 40 years of writing, I've been lucky enough — or sometimes unlucky enough — to meet and write about many of America's "somebodies," mostly vapid asshole movie and TV stars and rock musicians. When I was young, so-called "media journalism" then was just what it is now, what we called "starfucking," and amounted to writing PR for media corporations in "music journals" of the time. But we covered a few worthwhile iconic figures in the mix as well — the kind that stick around in the background of one's thinking forever. At my age now, I find a lot of them are dying off, the Hunter Thompsons, Susan Sontags, Ken Kesey and Kurt Vonneguts. However, I have a self-imposed policy not to eulogize them because the hundreds of sentimental Internet tributes that flourish upon their deaths somehow seem ghoulish, and because it is a universal truth that we writers will do anything for an audience, and celebrity death is one of the easiest ways to attract one.

On rare occasions though, usually while writing late at night, the ghost of one of these people, the shade of an especially prescient writer or thinker, sneaks up, slaps me across the back of the head and says: "I told you so!" And when two appear in a single night, well, you gotta write about it.

So here I am at 2 AM pretending to write — at least until I've killed the rest of this bottle of Old Granddad — but actually thrashing amid my old files, when I stumble upon personal notes from 1982, rough drafts and clips regarding Hunter S. Thompson and Timothy Leary, written and published around the same time. Both of them now strike me as brilliant in their defiance of American mediocrity, and symbolic actors in the media's Great Cultural Outlaw Game.

I say symbolic because the news media then and still does require all types of symbolic actors to hold the nation's attention and shape its reality. Today they range from

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

Paris Hilton and Bill O'Reilly to Rosie O'Donnell, or political actors such as Barack Obama and John McCain. Or heroic figures in sport and war such as Patrick Tillman (which didn't work out as well as planned by its Pentagon managers.) Even the most insentient lump of flesh may serve the purpose. Terry Schiavo comes to mind.

But the media also needs cultural outlaws, and allows a few of them either to serve as national examples of our supposed freedom of expression, or to serve as definitions of deviation from the norm and how it is punished. Tim Leary called it "The Outlaw Game," and he and Thompson were two examples of the outlaw's part in the superstate's instructive televised morality play. Real cultural outlaws are still allowed on stage. But to be acceptable to the corporate media state's manufactured reality, they must construct a persona (or be assigned one based upon what their behavior symbolizes) and maintain that persona, for which they are either rewarded, as Thompson was, or imprisoned as Leary was, according to the role they play out in the TV news non-reality show. Ever it was thus since the advent of television.

Yet, what strikes me about this folder of wrinkled notes is the hardening of the media model, and the changes in the American attitude regarding freedom and state authority since then. Not to mention the sheer outrageousness or permissible persona then, and the ominous prescience of some of Thompson's and Leary's quotes, scrawled down so long ago. And so I write the following from those old notes.

### **A delightful evening of equine slaughter**

It is 5 PM in an upper room of the Aspen's Hotel Jerome, and Hunter S. Thompson is pacing. He speaks in punchy AK magazine round bursts: "We've got to get that horse murder flick! We gotta get that goddamned movie!!"

"What movie?" I ask.

"The movie I want to open with tonight. It's a horse being slaughtered by acid freaks in the throes of a nervous breakdown — a hideous, horrible disgusting thing. Got to get it. Listen to this!" He punches at a small cassette recorder tucked under his arm ...

"GAAAAAAAAGH! SHREEEEEEEEEEE! GURGLE...WHINEEEEEEEE! CRUNCH!"

The microphone is up close to the horse's throat so you can hear its last bloody gurgles of agony, then deranged laughter.

"Jesus Christ, Thompson, the sound track alone would puke a Nazi oven tender off a gut wagon. That's the sickest fucking thing I ever heard."

"Me too," he answers. "It'll drive a silver spike right through the rotten diseased heart of this town!"

The hearts he was plotting to impale this very evening belonged to the audience at an Aspen community school benefit where he was to appear, along with Jimmy

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

Buffet and The Eagles' Glen Frey (both of whom, if I remember correctly, had places in Aspen at the time). Problem was, nobody could find the film, since it had been stashed long ago to protect the identity of what Hunter claimed was a well-known national political figure who had starred in the blood gushing footage. Vague evidence indicated the horse snuff flick might be buried over on the farming town of Paonia, Colorado. "We'll rent a chopper," Hunter exclaims, "scour the state if necessary." He was not getting much cooperation from the two other longhairs present, apparently there to help him accomplish this mad, eleventh hour plan.

Every 15 minutes or so he made one of those convenience runs to the bathroom we all made back then, the kind where you came out wiping your nose, just in case any of Aspen's snowflakes had happened to fall while you were supposedly taking that ten second piss. I figured he was still working on that ounce of blow I'd copped for him the day before (and swiped a gram from before delivery). But when he comes out announcing he has to run a rather suspicious sounding errand, I think, "Could he really have hoovered up 28 grams of nose candy in 24 hours?" Yet 20 minutes later he was back and now "tapping the glass" with the rest of us. The afternoon rotted on.

Finally, after many phone calls and as many trips downstairs to the bar, Hunter plops down on the hotel room bed with a grim look of resignation. "It's no use," he says. "We'll never find it. The horse murder is off. Too bad. We could have yanked their nerve ends right out through their pores, put out their eyes in one grisly flash of the truth. The truth is so much heavier than fiction ..." I would guess that the flick probably never existed, and was merely this evening's installment of an ongoing manufactured fiction that maintained his persona, one so exquisitely extravagant as to illuminate the brutally real truth.

Glen Frey strolls into the room

"Is this the office of Hunter Thompson Productions?"

"Yeah. You want to murder a horse tonight?"

"Huh?"

"You and Buffet."

"Oh shit, you weren't going to show that horse thing you talked about ... I mean, man, well ... I'd never follow that on stage anyway." Looking relieved, Frey asks, "So what else is happening down there tonight?"

"Whatever you and Jimmy end up doing. I'm just showing up to take the blame. It might be strange tonight."

"It was bound to be," Frey sighs.

### **Pogo and the G-Man**

Now for the moment, let us jump forward a bit to my other assignment of the week, Tim Leary's arrival in Boulder, Colorado. After picking Leary up at the Denver airport,

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

we are plowing through the bright Colorado sun in a rented car. Leary is giving me his "mind mutant assessment" of the surroundings: "Late terrestrial species architecture, mostly silica fusion and inorganic slab construction, erected by the musculotonic legions of the late Twentieth Century industrial feudal dynasties." From his pocket he extracts "a packet of aromatic hydrocarbon sticks," bringing one to his lips and lighting it, drawing in the smoke deeply, obviously savoring the tingle nicotine is sending through his bloodstream. Timothy Leary has arrived in Boulder, Colorado.

Not the same Boulder as everyone else's, to be sure. But what could you expect from a self-appointed national director of chemical consciousness, "visionary outlaw philosopher scientist bard," and "unrepentant dope fiend out to mutate every mind I can lay my hands on toward higher intelligence — their own."

This 61-year old bright eyed ex-Harvard psychologist bouncing around in white Nikes and a pinstriped shirt did not strike me as burned out at all. I'd covered Fleetwood Mac a bit earlier, and believe me, compared to Stevie Nix, Leary was not even slightly crispy around the edges. Of course at the time he was raving about the "smart drugs," and by that he was not referring to ginkgo biloba either, but drugs such as hydergine. So who really knows? One thing for sure though: Ken Kesey was right when he said when Leary had short haircuts he looked like Pogo.

Strangely enough, Timothy Francis Leary was in Boulder, the town at the foot the North American hippy Himalayas, to meet with the improbable personage of George Gordon Liddy, boogey-demon of Watergate plumbing job and hand over the flame fame. Mr. Sheer Will. At the moment though, Liddy was checking into an undisclosed room across town at the Hilton. Twenty-four hours from now he'd be debating Leary in what was being touted as "the heavyweight philosophical bout of the year." The topic was "Personal Freedom vs. Authority," which Leary declared was the nation's primary struggle and would be so in the future.

I won't go into the evening's show, "Debate for the Soul of America," but will just say that, despite its canned performance, it was marvelously funny, yet spot on the vital subject it addressed — freedom vs. authority — in a way today's managed debates can never be. In fact, media debates today never even touch the subject because participants have too much to lose, given that they are among the chosen ones issuing the "one voice to the many." Today's equivalent would probably be Noam Chomsky vs. Dick Cheney, which we are never going to see, and which surely wouldn't be as entertaining, given Cheney's embalmed cheerlessness. Chomsky is no Richard Pryor either, but Chomsky wields perhaps the heaviest hammer of political and historical truth in America, so there might be some entertainment value in watching it come down on that old Gila monster. Or maybe Gore Vidal vs. Tucker Carlson ... sigh ... like that's ever gonna happen.

As Liddy put it at the time: "Tim and I can say anything we damned well want to.

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

We're both ex-cons and have done hard time and not the country club kind either, for what we believe, and have no credibility whatsoever to preserve." Even given that Leary and Liddy both were relentless self-promoters, they nevertheless spoke openly and loudly of important things we never hear expressed meaningfully any place today but on the most leftward frontiers of the Internet. Not semi-abstract electronic database privacy rights, which, serious as they are, most Americans could give a shit about until it results in some brutal act of oppression, such as raising their car insurance rate 50 bucks. These two talked — and in absolute seriousness — about such things as the right to live as a naked lotus eater in the public park if you chose to because it was your park, your body and your planet. Or the right to shoot down any armed police or government authority that came through your door unannounced (an opinion that got Liddy into some hot water years later.) They were enthusiastic about the debate, not the least of reasons for which was that they both still owed millions in legal fees and this was a paying gig. But they were not too desperately sweating it. As Leary said, "the first people to visit you in your cell after being arrested in The Outlaw Game are the media agent and his lawyer. In the meantime Leary still had royalties from numerous books and Liddy was negotiating the deal for a television docu-drama based upon his own book, Will.

### **James Bond and the 40-foot rainbow colored pulsating vagina**

Later, over drinks at the Boulderado Hotel lounge it was obvious there was a certain mutual respect, though I doubt real friendship — their huge egos left little space for that — as they recounted the famous Millbrook bust. Liddy says, "The good burghers of Dutchess County were horrified of what was going on there. Remember that this was a county where the justice of the peace practiced with his machine gun in his off hours." Liddy does not mention that he had serious ambitions toward becoming Deputy District Attorney of Dutchess County, New York and that a better PR opportunity than nailing the Pope of Dope naked with some nubile teenager, or better yet, a young drugged boy, inside a hedonic compound would play very well with the voters. It is nearly impossible for informed young people today to grasp how the sexually repressed "Greatest Generation" saw the world we were rebelling against. There was no Jerry Springer Show, no internet porn to inform and titillate their little worlds of lights-out missionary sex and long post-war retreat into the ignorant traditional values of the prewar era. As my postwar bride mother-in-law says: "I didn't even know what incest meant until I'd been married ten years!"

And so, Liddy, the ambitious Catholic prep school kid from Hoboken with a law degree and an instinct for the middle class conservative mind's bottomless appetite for any source of outrage to give vent to their inner repressions — and naked painted bodies dancing on the lawn under strobe lights was about as outrageous as things

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

got sat the time — he saw his ticket in Leary. He busted Leary twice on his way up the political ladder, ultimately catching the attention of Richard Nixon by running for the House of Representatives against Nixon's man, millionaire Hamilton Fish. By some mysterious process, the widely popular Liddy suddenly quit campaigning against Fish in the critical last weeks of the race. Fish won and Liddy started working for Nixon. By 1971 he was on Nixon's White House staff and willing to do anything to get to the next level. Which, in the Republican scheme of things of course, spells some sort of criminality.

Along the way though, Liddy succeeded in overturning many of the nation's drug laws, one of which made LSD illegal, for which I must personally confess that I can never forgive the man. All I can say to readers under sixty is that it was a whole different world before LSD was made illegal in 1968. There was the freedom of consciousness exploration without any paranoia whatsoever — which is the only way it can be done. Finding yourself was your own business and no authority whatsoever had the power to intrude. Anyway, Liddy's path to Watergate began with the bust at Millbrook.

"The Millbrook bust was certainly no textbook execution of a search warrant," Liddy said. "The whole night was hellish and the trial was even worse. Tim dragged 32 Hindus into the courtroom."

Leary, (laughing): "It was a Saturday night and we had already been tipped off by all the deputy sheriffs' teenaged kids, who acted as informants for us. We had extra-terrestrial company at the time, all sorts of Buddhists, yogis, scientists, light artists, psychedelic cannibals ... The place was a launching pad for higher ideas. The light artists had it all set up to greet the cops with a 40-foot rainbow-colored pulsating vagina over the lawn. But the cops got hung up, and things dragged on, so we all called it a night and went into the bedrooms to smoke a strong hallucinogenic drug called DMT. After a few puffs the room was a glowing and hissing molecular time-space warp.

"Then BOOM! Here comes James Bond Liddy through the door with 24 armed and booted state troopers. Gordon was just beatific. His face was every color of the rainbow, his eyes shot out laser beams, and he had this powerful halo around him. And I cannot even describe what the 24 dinosaurs in trooper uniforms looked like! Whew! Meanwhile, the dope pipe laid there on the bed screaming 'HERE I AM! HERE I AM!' My wife immediately covered it with a blanket, then pointed across the room and yelled, "Don't you dare touch my pot!" In typical knee-jerk storm trooper fashion, 24 cops and Gordon himself stomped across the room and seized a pound of peat moss, and off we all merrily went to jail."



## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

### **The saltpeter crystal meth acid test**

Back to Thompson and the boys in Aspen: On the way to the benefit show, Thompson hands me three Snow Seal bindles of coke that admirers had given him that day. "What the fuck?" I asked. "Poisoning," he answers. "That stuff could be scraped off the acid on a battery cable for all I know. I never take free dope from strangers." I could smell, as it were, the wisdom in that policy.

As you may guess, given the hotel room planning session, the gig was totally fucked. The only bright spot was a BBC documentary of his legendary Aspen sheriff's race a few years before, when he ran on an anarchist dope freak power ticket and damn near won. Next in the show came a very strange Buffet-Frey duet on a song called "Hunter Thompson Weekend", which came off about as entertaining as watching laundry dry on heroin. Most of the evening consisted of Hunter hanging up there exposed like a side of raw beef before a sea of fossilized rich-liberal horseshit, taking questions such as "What can we do as citizens to blah, blah, blah ...". And so Thompson, whose speaking gigs were usually a stammering incoherent bore anyway, had managed to pull off one perhaps worse than usual. Sitting in the Jerome Bar afterward, he said, "I like them more aggressive than that. I like to go up there ready to kill, get the adrenaline flowing, throw chairs. After all, I've already been paid to do the job, so I'll go down into the crowd and grapple with the bastards hand to hand if necessary." Which was of course pure bull, as anyone who ever paid to see him speak can attest. In all fairness though, the Mr. Gonzo was difficult enough to create as a literary figure, and absolutely impossible to deliver live and on demand. And nobody wanted to listen to a discussion of the man as a writer.

Hunter then insisted that I, my wife and small son who had come along with me (Oh my god! I'd stone forgotten they had been waiting an hour now for me to come get them!) go with him to some upscale restaurant for escargot — which I hadn't the slightest notion of what it was at the time — with Buffett, Frey and a bunch of glitzy personalities. I kept declining and making excuses, but the truth was that I and my humble little hippie family couldn't even afford a room for the night, and had planned to drive from Aspen the 210 miles home to Boulder, however late it turned out to be. Finally, and with a trace of real kindness, Hunter said, "You won't be paying for anything."

But first, of course, a little more toot. "Howz come you used to call this stuff a pussy drug, dope for fruits?" I asked. "Your nose runs with the best of 'em."

"It's still a fruit drug. You just can't find anyone who'll eat hard drugs with you these days. Coke is a pathetically safe ritual. Pass it around at parties and all that shit. I guess I just happen to like it. I can maintain on it in some vague way. What I'm going to start doing is carrying around huge quantities of acid, crystal meth and saltpeter mixed together. Take it to parties and say, 'Here, have a snort.' Watch'em go into car-

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

diac nervous convulsions.”

For a moment then, he became evasive, pensive. After a while he said, “Writing politics is not like it used to be. Even covering a war has no kick. It’s like writers are being ordered back to cover the farm teams. Some new kind of rot is creeping into the scene. Something more dangerous than Nixon ever was.”

“Well, maybe you’ve reached the limit. How can you out-gonzo yourself after you’ve already out-gonzoed yourself? Maybe it’s like Kesey said of writing a classic, that lightning doesn’t strike twice in the same place.” No reply. He looked grim. But at the restaurant feast Hunter was good ebullient, and hilarious in his antics to convince my son Timothy to eat a snail.

Even then, 25 years ago, in it was clear he was doomed to remain the savage Raoul Duke. And that he preferred it that way — out in front of the adoring counterculture’s eyes, brilliantly mixing the gonzo myth and fact and pure bullshit into the most wonderfully toxic, astute image of American politics that had ever come down the pike. And honestly speaking, it was the self destructive persona his liberal readers loved most. So what further excess would it take to satisfy them? Thompson blasting an ounce of coke up his nose with a high powered paint gun at the Hollywood Bowl?

Meanwhile, there is that bottle here by the keyboard: Old Granddad, your lined face, profoundly wise, compromised, yet the eyes with a glint of mischief and hope. Your scarified, archetypal countenance tells us every thing we need or even want to know.

“I have been here a hell of a long time, son. I ain’t going to compromise, I don’t need to. I’m perpetually drunk, and you know as well as I that these are the values that make America great.”

Granddad, your picture makes me thirsty.

### **The python and the mafia**

Liddy and Leary are winding down the night at a table on the Boulderado Hotel’s mezzanine lounge, obviously aware people around them are listening but sophisticated enough not to gawk. Liddy says he wants to see public debate come back in style again, as in 1968 when William Buckley, live and on coast to coast network television said to Gore Vidal: “Now listen, you queer, stop calling me a crypto-Nazi or I’ll sock you in your goddamn face and you’ll stay plastered.” Good old fashioned hand to hand combat debate. Liddy said, “I’d like to see public debate come back as a vital source of information.”

Leary: “I’d just like to see thinking come back in style. I haven’t heard a new idea in eight years. Let’s get ordinary people arguing and talking again. I want to trigger new circuits in their nervous systems. That’s the philosopher’s job and I am the most

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

important philosopher at this time.”

Unfazed by Leary's bold claim, Liddy continues: "Americans are becoming increasingly stupid. The greatest tragedy of our time is the disintegration of the public education system in this country. Even if half the young people they are turning out were geniuses, they can't communicate or write well enough to be effective." Liddy has always been smart and his lament is not disingenuous. Trouble is that smart ambitious people get hung up on the smart part, and not the heart part — which is why we never seem to get a single decent presidential candidate offered by either party, just smart overly ambitious people such as Bill and Hillary Clinton, or in George W. Bush's case, the third generation congenitally flawed seed of the terminally rich for whom audacity passes as dedication and sheer arrogance as a sure sign for the masses that he must know what he is doing.

Liddy continues to bemoan the decay of American public education. "Kids now come out of even good colleges unable to write a coherent sentence" ... yada yada ... until Leary interrupts him. Winking, Leary says, "Gordon wants to go back to the days when only 10 percent of Americans could go to college. Writing is a hieroglyphic art these days. And besides, only 10 percent of people are genetically wired, fired and inspired to do it. That makes it an elitist skill. Computers are going to replace hieroglyphics text as communication. Computers will be THE drug of the future."

"Then we'll have computer addiction and computer abuse," I laugh.

"As always, 90 percent of the people who do or do not use any kind of drug, do so stupidly. But you cannot ban drugs and you cannot have a drug-free society. If that's what you want, then go to China. The same people who want a drug-free society want a sex-free society. If you want a drug-free and sex-free society (waves his arm), then go to China."

"China is one half of the struggle happening on the planet right now. And the struggle is for the consciousness of the planet, a struggle between the mass centralization of China, which American corporate feudal lords aspire to, which breeds that Maoist, insectoid kind of suspicion ... [And sure enough, we find China today expending more effort in surveillance of the Internet than developing it usefully] the authoritarian Soviet-style state vs. the American sixties style self-realization movement toward individuality and self-evolution. The main battle is for the consciousness of the American people. It's the biggest ballgame they will ever play. And it is being played for keeps between cultural outlaws and the repressive forces of military police court authority worshippers. During the Sixties an undeclared civil war took place and the right side won."

"Yeah, my side," says Liddy. "And we're not about to let it happen again."

"Between the end of World War 1946 and 1965," Leary explains, "my generation

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

produced you, the 75 million babies who wanted everything, the whole world. And we tried to give it to you. I was busy all the time digging retaining walls at the nursery school ... And here you are still moving through the American culture like an avalanche of pure appetite. You are the python and American culture is the pig in your belly.

"Your generation is in charge from here on out. Not the government mafia, and all governments are mafias. The American mafia is the best because it gives more for our money, but both political parties are families of that same mafia. On one hand you have the Democrats, who are genuinely stupid. They think America's problems can all be solved from Washington, DC. At the same time, Democrats tend to be kind of nice people. But the Republicans understand mafia power is about fear. They are a bunch of mean repressive motherfuckers and always have been.

"You are the hottest, sexiest, most empowered generation ever. You're in charge of your own evolution now that we've deciphered the DNA code. The future is going to be different. You can't be bought off because there are just too many of you. You can make the world into anything you want. Open up all the world's future possibilities. So you should go for it!"

Obviously we didn't. But it was a tall order to start with.

In retrospect, I would have liked to have stirred more discussion of personal freedom and authoritarianism between Liddy and Leary who, after all, personified the giant struggle between the authoritarian state and sixties-style self-realization. How did these philosophical and ideological enemies accommodate their ultra-serious differences? We often hear, historically, about enemies able to call a temporary truce, which of course gives us valuable insight into the nature of warfare. What are the mechanics of such a truce, however brief? Here were two modern men, a microcosmic example in the persons of Liddy and Leary.

But this wasn't Truman against Stalin or Caesar against Pompey. They were simply ambitious men who overshot their expectations and found themselves to be serving as symbolic gladiators over an immensely important issue in the media coliseum, but there only for the amusement, revulsion and/or adulation of the throng. And their success or failure depended upon the persona they created and sustained.

### **Death by digitized celebrity**

The effect of stardom and electronic immortality on these two men was apparent. I'd seen it in dozens of rock stars and as many movie actors and artists (an interview with Warhol comes to mind, but then, media's hyper-superficiality was the point of his art). But to what extent was the authenticity of Leary's and Liddy's respective mes-

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

sages corrupted by their clear addiction to celebrity? Well, not much in Liddy's case because he later chose to go into the entertainment business, and why not? There is a certain kind of honesty in a convicted felon, a burglar to be exact, making a legitimate living doing what he is truly best at — radio comedy for jock commuters.

Leary's predictions in particular keep haunting me because they have proven true, even after his death and despite decades of media portrayal of him as LSD Outlaw Fool. Are other valuable, inspired insights from brilliant people today being similarly trivialized? Probably. But they can no longer gain entry to the now closed system corporate media. Otherwise, Stan Goff would be among network television's chief commentators on the war in Iraq and all things military and covert. Paul Craig Roberts would be anchoring television discussions of American domestic political policy, or at least replacing the soothing artificially thoughtful news analysis of NPR's Daniel Schor, and Paul Krassner would be where Al Franken is today. Amy Goodman is the genuine article, but she's relegated to the outer rings of planet media, which the American Internet left deludes itself into believing is closer to the center. I'd love to see her put her foot up Katie Couric's ass and say, "Now hand me the mike, bitch!" It'd be nice, wouldn't it? But, believe me or don't believe me, most Americans have never heard of any of the truth-speaking people above, so let's not bullshit ourselves that we have a real voice in media. Yet. For the time being, we still have what super-state capitalism allows us to have a voice on the Internet, and Pacifica Radio (god bless their freedom loving hearts) — that Mediterranean Avenue on the Monopoly board of the airwaves. All the hot properties remain dedicated to what will sell buckets of fried chicken to 300 pound people taught never to question authority.

As I walked out the front door of the Boulderado, I had no idea that Leary's comments on the cult of authority's war on individual freedom and the future importance of computers was the closest thing to political prophesy I'd ever hear. I stopped under a streetlight and jotted down their words merely because they sounded cool. By next morning however, there was an epiphany afoot. There was that electro-metallic tang of truth stinging the mind, the kind that only someone who has taken lots of LSD toward good purpose can perceive.

It was then I began vaguely to understand the Twentieth Century's new hyper-simulacran media-made man — the electronic, digital equivalent of Biblical transfiguration into something beyond the flesh. And how celebrity of any kind was becoming the new sainthood in the all pervading, overarching media holograph that now constitutes this civilization's temple.

Here were men whose televised infamy transformed them into brain consumable electronic entities, condemned (or canonized) to play their assigned roles forever. Once electrocuted by a certain voltage of fame, once a person is atomized through

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

the cathode ray tube into the ether of true celebrity, consumed as a host administered to the masses through television, there seems to be no recovery, no return. I've since watched the phenomena in dozens of celebrities from Madonna to Brad Pitt to Bill Clinton. They come to believe their own publicity because they are publicity. Some just have more power. For a brilliant gonzo writer or an explorer of personal freedom through consciousness, it is bad enough. But for politicians, whose sole occupation is obtaining and maintaining authority, it is nearly always fatal to the soul.

Such men are sentenced, or sentence themselves, to a life of the most extremely symbolic public performance. Then too, we all now live a life of performance. But on the far more dismal stage of the global economic system. We perform for a faceless audience of corporate managers and a handful of big investors, with advertisers casting our roles in the consumer state. The python has consumed and digested America and shit out what we see around us today. It now unhinges its jaws so as to swallow the world.

### **Pogo and the Dark Prince**

Thompson was anarchistic, with a dark yet hilarious sense of American folly and extreme dislike of authority. It was the darkness that got him. He started out as a sports writer and ended up as one. He had no magical insight, but he had unerring instincts, that golden gut, and was the heavyweight champ when it came to punching words into an expression of the America he saw and felt around him. He still wears the title belt.

Almost at the other end of the spectrum stood Leary, whose belief in "the enlightened spirit of philosophical levity" was anything but dark, at least as he presented it to the world. His messianic act (much of which, like his stand-up philosopher routine, was a spoof that the press never quite got) but Leary's authentic pioneering of pure consciousness itself — the raw stuff of self liberation — is still remembered and admired by those of us who experienced it first hand. Not to mention a handful of young but more alienated generation of countercultural consciousness explorers. Discredited to the broad public from the beginning, he remains. Despite 30 years of neoconservative foundations' efforts to cast Leary as the antichrist, he remains. The most recent discrediting comes in a very well written book cataloguing each and all of his worst mistakes and character faults in excruciating detail — yet curiously avoiding any attempt to explain the source of his worldwide charisma in proselytizing LSD. Some truths are too risky for publishers in our security state's Good German consumer market. And one of them is that LSD anarchizes the brain, creates brotherhood and sisterhood and a deep sense of awe for the natural things of this earth —

## **JOE BAGEANT: GHOSTS OF TIM LEARY & HUNTER THOMPSON**

dangerous concepts in a nation making war both on Middle Eastern children and nature itself. To be sure, Leary was an inconsistent fuck-up by Middle American standards, and a hopeless narcissist too; but hell, those are now considered qualifications for the presidency and its entire cabinet.

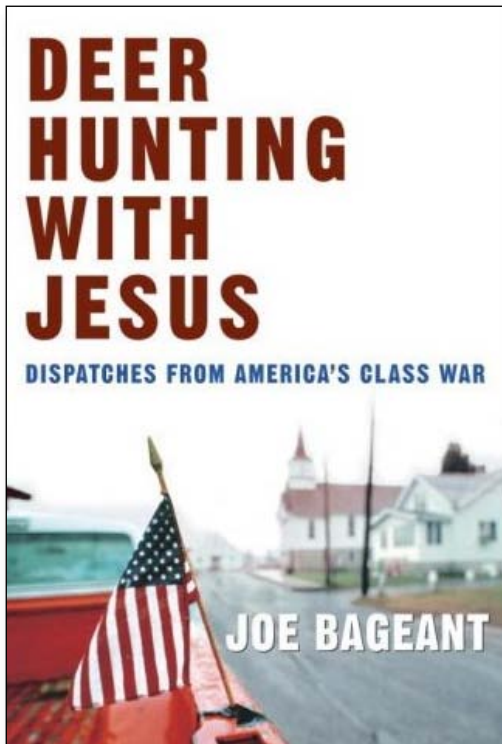
Thompson and Leary and even Liddy may be counted among what we like to call "complex" men — which in America means any self-contradicting person who can maintain the appearance of authority and confidence, and has a vocabulary of more than 400 words. Unless he or she is a true artist, in which case they must offer public demonstrations of pathos and self-abuse or, better yet, commit suicide, thereby obtaining the mantle of complexity in their obituary. But mainly it comes down to confusing the Calvinist Capitalist template of the American mind. We are lucky that the template historically has had enough cracks in it to allow a few contradictory wild, untamed rebels to slip through, made some of us receptive to guys like HST and Leary, or for that matter, Lenny Bruce and Little Richard.

Obviously, I retain a special affection for Uncle Tim. If any of these men could legitimately be called complex, it is probably Leary. A brilliant scientist, he was often reviled by traditional scientists, whom he called "arrogant motherfuckers who deny their role in the military industrial complex's manipulation of the American people." Leary rejected what he called the "grim Newtonian mechanics of objective fact" for the "free flowing quantum physics approach to consciousness" that the changing, not the static, governs consciousness and the outcome of the world. "Understanding this even intuitively," he said, makes people unmanageable by agents of the criminal government syndicate that runs and ruins America." That sort of talk was why Nixon called him "the most dangerous man in America."

If God really is an authoritarian prison warden of mankind, Leary and Thompson are hanging from their tongues on hooks somewhere in hell. And if not, then they are basking in the glow of that 40-foot rainbow pussy. Meanwhile, a few old beatnik and hippy coots still understand how arbitrary even the most deeply held concepts of reality are. It's like the old cliché about jazz, "You either you get it or you don't."

Having inspired much reflection, not to mention tomfoolery, in countless men, Old Granddad counsels wisely: "There's such a thing as going on too long about anything, son. Day's a breaking. Now go the hell to bed."

*This essay is dedicated to Gypsy Joe Hess (1919-1988).*



Order Joe Bageant's book

## **DEER HUNTING WITH JESUS** **Dispatches From America's Class War**

"Many friends and readers will notice that the title has changed to *Deer Hunting With Jesus: Dispatches From America's Class War*. The original title was *Drink, Pray, Fight, Fuck: Dispatches From America's Class War*. Contrary to what one might suspect, the name change had not as much to do with the word "fuck" as it did the fact that a book was recently released with a very similar title. Then too, when I started putting the title "Drink, Pray, Fight, Fuck" on the web, it kicked off some merchandising by small scale entrepreneurs of ball caps, tee-shirts, etc. bearing the four words. Which is no problem with me – I like to see the little guy printing tee-shirts make a buck" – JOE BAGEANT

Pre-order now from [http://www.amazon.com/Deer-Hunting-Jesus-Dispatches-Americas/dp/030733936X/ref=pd\\_sxp\\_f\\_pt/104-7289464-5668749?ie=UTF8](http://www.amazon.com/Deer-Hunting-Jesus-Dispatches-Americas/dp/030733936X/ref=pd_sxp_f_pt/104-7289464-5668749?ie=UTF8)

The book will be released in June, 2007



# READ MORE BY JOE BAGEANT

Download all of Joe Bageant's essays, plus many more books, booklets, essays, newspapers and magazines – all in pdf format – all free of charge, at [www.coldtype.net](http://www.coldtype.net) (*Click on this link to enter web site*)

**ColdType**

WRITING WORTH READING FROM AROUND THE WORLD