



Fade to Black Presents:

Memorable Scams

Interview

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Mainstream media does not need much help in making itself look bad, but for nearly thirty years, master scam artist Joey Skaggs has been doing all he can to lend a hand. Eager for the big scoop, today's news reporters and 'journalists' will jump on any story, regardless how outrageous or poorly researched, in their endless quest for a larger circulation and higher ratings. And nothing exposes the media's blatant disregard for the facts better than Joey's hoaxes. Bordering on hilarity and cutting deep into the layers of sensationalism which the media smothers us in, Joey's hoaxes reveal the gross incompetence and the alarming lack of journalistic integrity which plagues the mass media industry. Never the top "what-we've-found-will-shock-you" story at Eleven is it? We caught up with Joey asked him about his art.

But first, let's take a look at some of the more memorable scams Joey has pulled off.

Memorable Scams





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Some memorable Joey Skaggs Media Skams



Cathouse For Dogs

A modest advertisement in the Village Voice stating, "Cathouse for dogs . . . featuring a savory selection of hot bitches..." and inviting any proud dog owner to reward his 'best friend' by getting him laid for only \$50, was all it took for Joey to pull off a memorable scam. Immediately after the paper hit the stands,

the phone began ringing off the hook with callers whom not only wanted to get their dogs laid, but who also wanted to have sex with dogs or to simply watch dogs have sex. It was just a matter of time until the media hounds got wind of the story and came running. Getting together 25 actors and 15 dogs, Joey staged an elaborate performance in a small, SoHo loft. The airing of an WABC-TV story which painted Joey as a sleaze-bag dog pimp incited the ASPCA, the Bureau of Animal Affairs, the NYPD Vice Squad along with various other religious and human organizations. After finally being served with a subpoena by the Attorney General's office, Joey scheduled a press conference to reveal himself. After the truth was told, in fear of projecting a less than professional image. ABC refused to retract the story. Thus, millions of people continue to believe that there still operates a "Cathouse For Dogs" somewhere in New York City.



The Fat Squad

What does it take to get booked on Good Morning America? A plump and juicy story that anyone would love to sink their teeth into. What could be more appetizing than a fictional group of weightwatchers called the "Fat Squad" lead by Joe Bones (a.k.a. Joey Skaggs). For

\$300 a day, plus expenses, so this prank went, "Fat Squad Commandos" could be hired to follow you around 24 hours a day, making sure you stick to your diet (even if it means using force!) The Philadelphia Inquirer and The Washington Post were among the first media establishments to fall for this hoax. The story made it to a wire service and was sent around the world in a week eventually landing Joey an appearance on Good Morning America. After Joey exposed the hoax, GMA was forced to publicly apologize for not doing more homework before booking their quests.



Entertainment Tonight Hoax

In an effort to raise themselves





above the other news programs and display their superiority, the producers of Entertainment Tonight planned a special program on famous media hoaxes and how mainstream media were duped by such pranks. For the 'inside scoop'

on such hoaxes, E.T. contacted Joey and invited him to an exclusive interview. However, Entertainment Tonight's attempt in exposing these great hoaxes simply turned into yet another. How? Joey simply had his friend show up at the studio in his place. E.T. taped their 'exclusive' Joey Skaggs interview never catching on to the fact that the real Joey Skaggs was three thousand miles away in New York City. After the interview aired, Joey informed the producers of the truth. Entertainment Tonight, with their high journalistic standards, never aired a retraction.



Baba Wa Simba

Over sensationalized news reports are not just limited to United States. In another memorable scam, Joey made a trip to England as "Baba Wa Simba", a healer who traveled throughout

the world teaching people a new form of therapy which heals the 'wounded animal inside us all'. The therapy was simple, it involved roaring and acting like a lion. Some of the most prestigious media outlets in the United Kingdom, including the BBC, Good Morning TV, London Tonight, Sky TV News and The East London Advertiser, fell for the story. In the endless effort to educate the masses and boost ratings, some of the most respected news commentators got down on all fours and roared like lions as cameras rolled. After the story was revealed, not one of the news outlets retracted the story. For your reference, "Baba Wa Simba" in Swahili mean 'The Lion King'.



Kea So Joo, a.k.a. Dog Meat Soup

Kim Yung Soo (a.k.a. Joey Skaggs), President of Kea So Joo, Inc., sent 1,500 letters to dog shelters around America soliciting all their unwanted dogs for \$.10 a pound. The letter, written in obvious broken English, stated, "Dog shelter kill million of dog. cost money...Dog shelter need money to operate. Where it get money? Hard to get money. Many people like to eat dog...Where do they get dog?...We buy all

dog, regardless of size or color. We prefer big, young strong dog, but we take all dog from your dog shelter. Lot people eat dog...Dog is healthy for you...You make more money, more people happy. You get cleaner air. No burn up dog. No waste dog. People pet no disappear. Everybody happy...Dog no suffer. We have quick death for dog."

Kea So Joo's telephone rang off the hook. The outgoing message, in both Korean and English, was punctuated by yapping dogs in the harkground. Apply messages and faves come from the lower and

humanitarians across the country. The media picked up on the story and, even though none of the phone calls nor faxes were ever returned, many television and newspaper reporters stated that they had indeed spoken with representatives of the company and they were shocked at what they discovered.

Joey shared some of the hilarious messages and faxes he received during his Dog Meat Soup piece.

(It's letters like these that make you proud to be an American)

Dog Meat Soup Letters

Interview



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with



Part I of III

Have you ever been caught by the media before the prank hit?

Amazingly, not yet. I always expect it though because I reveal the hoax so I can talk about the more serious issues underlying the hoax. So I've gotten lots of exposure over the years. Also there are always lots of built-in clues. And because my work is collaborative I'm dependent on many other participants to keep a secret. So I'm always surprised that I'm able to get away with it. In actuality, it's a sad commentary on how the news media decides what is news worthy. And how we, the consumers, eat it up.

I'm batting a thousand. I'm always able to access the media with the story. Although I'm not always able to be the one to reveal the hoax (on my own terms). For example, as Joe Bones, owner of the Fat Squad, I had fooled radio,

"[CNN] having
'exposed'
me was really a
self-aggrandizing
statement
which to me is a big
joke."

newspaper, wire services and television networks around the world. But upon appearing on Good Morning America, numerous people called GMA to let them know that Joe Bones was actually Joey Skaggs. Luckily it was too late. The show had already aired and the story was international news.

You seem to get almost as much coverage in Europe as you do in United States. Why do you think that is, since most of your hoaxes have been perpetrated in United States?



FUN MEDIA FACTS

All the major media surveys for the past 20 years have shown that 80 to 90 percent of the mainstream media consistently votes for Democrats.

One, you could say that Europeans have a greater sense of appreciation for my satirical sense of humor. Two, you could say that that's not the case at all, but rather that they're hell-bent on exposing how wacky Americans are. They grab onto my stories because they illustrate how bizarre American culture is.

The Fat Squad was initiated in the U.S. but went around the planet via the world press in one week. Baba Wa Simba was done in London and also went around the world. There's another one in the works that is truly international, but I can't talk a

ne salk about that yet. Hint.

truly international, but I can't talk about that yet. Hint. Hint.

But the reality is that the foreign press is both envious and disdainful of America's cultural style. They look for weird stories about America and Americans. If they can't find them, they create them. Slants on stories are contrived just like in America. There's very little difference. And, sometimes, because of their attitudes, it's easier to fool them.

How does the United States main stream media compare with the media in other free world countries when it comes to sensationalism and the quality of news gathering?

The U.S. is an information and media dominant society. And that effects the rest of the world. A lot of other cultures now emulate our style of news delivery. We spend more money on promoting news media.

And we package the news. We've spread the "infotainment-30-second-sound-bite-news" worldwide. So what our gatekeepers (the corporate monopolies that own and control the media) choose to present gets a very wide audience. Look at the way we elevated the O.J. and Princess Di stories to media frenzies.

On the other hand, the U.S. media doesn't report about other nations' domestic news unless it directly effects our

"We learn geography through our war reports."

economy, there's a huge natural disaster or unless American soldiers are stationed somewhere for conflict. We learn geography through our war reports.

After you completely fooled CNN in 1995 with the Solomon Project, CNN claimed they would reevaluate their news gathering procedure. Do you think anything has changed, or was that just a nice sound-byte in order not to seem incompetent.

The CNN expose' was a most ridiculous and amusing expose'. The public, of course, did not see what actually

FUN MEDIA FACTS In 1995 ABC News apologized to Philip Moris Co. and R.J. Reynolds for alleging tobacco companies controlled nicotine levels in cigarettes after being threatened with a 10 billion dollar libel suit. Proving once again that big business does control the media.

transpired during the ambush taping of this piece. The reporter was furious and tried to entrap me and others who worked on the Solomon Project with inappropriate questions, the answers to which would have been used to embarrass and discredit me.

I refused to take the bait and I suspect that an editor at CNN forced the reporter to tone down her anger because the actual piece that aired did not have the edge she was projecting to me. But the piece ended saying "Skaggs has been unmasked, leading many in the media to hope that he has scammed his last."

What's funny is that my M.O. throughout my thirty + year career has always been to present myself and to expose the story — to explain why I did it and what it means. And the fact is that my concepts were featured on CNN

FUN MEDIA FACTS

Tobacco Co. executive who was critical to the industry after being threatened with lawsuit by the tobacco gian



five times previously (Portofess, Fish Condos, Walk Right!, Bad Guys, and my Entertainment Tonight hoax). So they're having "exposed" me was really a self aggrandizing statement which to me is a big joke.

CNN ARTICLE ON JOEY SKAGGS

(Note: Article will open in new browser window.)

When you offered an exclusive to Time Magazine, I though it was interesting that Bruce Handy, the editor of Time, turned it down because he felt that your shtick has gotten old. Does the little amount of media coverage you receive stem from the wall of silence the media has about pointing out it's own shortcomings?

His statement revealed his own need to protect the corporate jewels from me, this uncontrollable outside agitator. But, I don't need or expect praise from these people. What I was looking for was an opportunity to explain the underlying purpose of the hoax through a mainstream outlet, because it's usually just dismissed or trivialized or presented by an alternative media provider. But let's be real, the only reason Goliath would ever invite me to dinner would be to eat me.

Joey Skaggs Interview - Part II ...



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Part II of III

Go into a little detail about your creative process, how do the ideas for the hoaxes evolve?

The ideas result from my reflections, observations and criticisms of society. They're quirky, odd, and sometimes funny, but usually a literal or abstract interpretation of a social issue. I'm plugged into mass media and I know how it works. I look at the news as if it's a commercial and commercials as if they're news. I know exactly how they're both constructed and towards what end. I see how they affect peoples' thinking. And I get pissed off. My creative process has a lot to do with anger. Anger at the con jobs we perpetrate on each other and on ourselves -- the bullshit that we're taught, the bullshit we believe, and how we perpetuate it.

"The biggest is reality."

As a student I had formal challenge to a satirist training in advertising and fine art. Since then, I've turned to a medium where I've combined

the disciplines of the two to create a unique art form. use the media as a medium to create fine art. That excites me more and reaches more people. Now it's not just me against an empty canvas or me against a blank piece of paper. It's a whole other process. It's me against the entire establishment. That's why I love this medium so much. Because the medium itself "resists" me.

And I like what this work leaves behind. It's not like creating a painting on a canvas. It's creating a meme, a legend, a myth -- with its own life.

To me it's proactive and provocative. It challenges people. Certainly a lot more than a successful gallery opening of paintings would.

Having creative ideas is the easy part. There are many



FUN MEDIA FACTS Of the 1,700 daily papers, 9 percent are local polies and fewer than 15 corporations control most of the country's daily

> FUN MEDIA FACTS news journalist,

intator, and reporte was upset by dia criticism about his or air crusade against farm subsidies while on the 18,000 acres he own



things that a lot of people would like to see changed in society. Or that they would love to satirize. But what makes a prank difficult and challenging is the execution. Hoaxes have to be executable in a way that fool wise men and fools alike. And, they have to have universal appeal on a budget and in a time frame. It's like doing a film or theatrical production, where all the elements have to work together.

Everything leads up to the performance which has to be completely convincing. If it doesn't take off immediately, you have to nurse it along making improvisational changes as you

go. And then you have to follow and collect all the "reviews" (the newspaper, TV, and radio clips). And then do your expose' where you get to talk about why you did what you did and what happened.

To accomplish all of this, a whole lot of people have to be able to keep a secret and be willing to participate on many different levels – from offering specialized technical expertise to making hundreds of copies of press releases, etc.... Some are behind the camera (so to speak) and some in front of it.

They all have to understand and agree with the concept. Otherwise they could bring their own agenda to it and/or sabotage it consciously or unconsciously. So I'm totally at the mercy of all these other people. And I have to be trusting, frequently of total strangers (an amusing role reversal!).

What I always find interesting, is how many people are willing to participate. To me that says something about the human psyche and the strong need that many people have to rock the status quo. I offer lots of people the chance to do that through their participation.

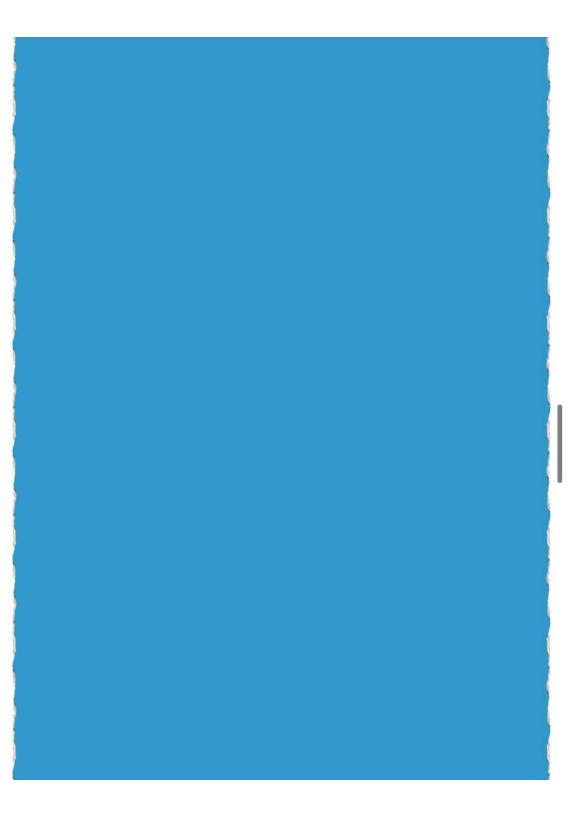
So it's fun for me, the artist, to share the creation of the work with other people. At the same time, I have to be a dictator because I have a vision of what I want the piece to be. I'm frequently handicapped by not having the means to act quickly enough. So an idea has to have a built in life cycle that will last as long as it takes me to execute it. Sometimes this works to my advantage though, because I can reflect on it and develop it over time as I figure out how to produce it. Because of this my concepts tend to be more reflective than jokish or slapstick. They can take several years to materialize.

The biggest challenge to the impressionist painters was the light – how long would they have to capture an image before the light changed.

The biggest challenge to a satirist is reality. If the satire is really plausible, sooner or later, it could come true! You have to make sure you get your piece out there before it does.

If I had lots of money I would be doing bigger pieces





FUN MEDIA FACTS

Both top network executives at NBC and CBS ennored rare footage taken deep inside Iraq at the height of the Gulf War, which showed heavy civilian carnage. Interviews with network producers who requested anonymity revealed that there was intense pressure to put out pro-war, pro-administration message.

that respond more quickly to issues. In other words, I'd be really dangerous. But there's no funding for the work I do. Nor is there a commercial market for it. But, I do what I do because its my art. To me it's more important than money.

Walk me through your creative process. For example, the Dog Meat Soup piece which was hilarious. Do you come up with a great idea, which also makes a great point, or do you see how the media loves stereotypes and think of what can you do to expose it? In other words, does the hoax ever become the catalyst for exposing the media, or do you start with a particular notion which you don't like about the media and think of a hoax which would expose it?

Actually illustrating how the media works or doesn't work (media literacy lessons presented through a prank) is only a part of what my work is about. The media is a tool for me, a vehicle. The fake realities I create have built into them specific issues I wish to address. Sometimes the real issue is hidden just under the surface of the performance. Sometimes it is linked to other issues in some way. Sometimes it is in-your-face obvious.

The point is I'm not out to just expose the media for its shortcomings (of which there are many), I'm using the power of the media to make a statement. I hope that I am creating a provocative and sometimes even funny way of looking at ourselves — our values, our beliefs. My performances are smoke and mirror illusions that are created entirely with the help of the media.

The concepts have a plausibility factor and are made to be news worthy. I make something enticing for the news media even when they suspect that it may be a little too weird to be real. The sad thing is that the too-weird-to-be-real part is so sought after and pervasive in the media.

You asked me about Kea So Joo (which means Dog Meat Soup with Alcohol). I perpetrated that hoax during the summer of 1994. This performance was created almost entirely by the media and the righteous/racist dog lovin' humanitarians who bit the tale. My part, besides conceiving the nasty concept,

"Thousands of cursing, swearing, threatening humanitarians called, sent faxes and wrote vicious letters to vent their feelings about the human consumption of dogs."

which of course was based on the fact that some Asian cultures do eat dog, was to create the fake reality. The performance was then entirely created by the news media and the animal rights activists who were appalled by the concept of dogs as food.

To help set it up, I had the technical help and support of several Korean friends who were very much aware of and supportive of my intentions -- to expose racism and cultural intolerance both in the public and in the news

media. I had access to a Korean computer to create the letterhead and a Korean woman recorded the outgoing message on my answering machine with dogs yapping in the back ground as if they were about to be placed in a stew pot.

My role in this particular performance, was extremely passive. I didn't have to do anything but write and mail the press release and then log the incoming responses. I never answered the phone because I wanted to see what would happen.

Thousands of cursing, swearing, threatening humanitarians called, sent faxes, and wrote vicious letters to vent their feelings about the human consumption of dogs. These concerned caring people called the news media for me. And the news media immediately responded in droves.

The coverage of the story was extremely biased and racist. For example, an Asian restaurant owner was ambushed by a TV reporter. He was shown the outrageous letter I had written and asked if he had seen it before -- if he knew anything about this. He was grilled as if he was a dog eating, cat eating, pigeon eating, less than human, Asian foreigner. To make the situation worse, the TV station ran the name of his restaurant as a chest caption. The news crew must have delighted in having picked him out. And in a sly condescending way, seemed to imply that "Yes we really know what happens in Chinese restaurants."

Joey Skaggs Interview
- Part I

Joey Skaggs Interview
- Part III



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Part III of III

Did you ever think of a great hoax and later scrap it, because it just did not say enough, or was not making a sharp enough point. Even though you knew the media would bite and it would be funny?

I dismiss concepts that I don't think are sharp or funny. More importantly I dismiss concepts I believe are irresponsible, illegal or would endanger the health or well-being of other people.

I give an example of this in the Research Pranks book, (Volume 11) from the sixties. I had thought about blocking the Lincoln tunnel with a large object, like a fish, a cork, or a tampon...and having a crew film the backed up traffic and the police and tow truck going in to clear it out. It definitely would have made the news. I wanted to make a comment about the absurdity of art movements. I was going to call it the "Bowel Movement." The name of the piece was "Obstruction Art." But upon thinking it through I realized that it was irresponsible. A disaster could occur (a fire, someone getting ill or dying) and my making a statement on the news was not a priority if it jeopardized people's lives.

I take great pains to be careful with my performances so that the only person ever in any danger is me. For

example, during the Dog Meat Soup performance, there were many irate people looking for the proprietor. And, as Father Anthony Joseph pedaling a portable confessional booth, I ran the danger of offending zealots. Many people have been killed in the name

of God. This was true for the Vietnamese Nativity and the Faster Sunday Crucifix performances

FUN MEDIA FACTS

Weatherman Sean Boyd was fired by news station KMJ in

Fresno, after refusing to
change his weather forecast
which predicted a chance of
rain for the KMJ-sponsored Picnic and Politically Incorrect Barbecue" honoring Rush Limbaugh

Do you believe the media has any kind of an agenda as suggested by people such as George Will on the right, and Noam Chomsky on the left? Or do you believe the only agenda the news media has is ratings?

It's impossible for everyone in a news establishment to have the same agenda. It is most probable that there are people with very specific agendas whose goal it is to express their agendas and to get you to believe in them. They are the gatekeepers of information. What I hope my work does is to challenge them and expose their preconceived notions, their prejudices, their belief systems -- their hypocrisy.

Although this was a bit before my time, I always heard historians refer to Watergate as the crucial turning point in media's evolution. After the downfall of Nixon the media seem to take on a holier than thou, idealistic view of itself. Do you feel this to be so, and if you do, does this view that the media has about itself made it easier for you to do what vou do?

I think the media industry increasingly has become vested in self-glorification. But, I think it has more to do with the business of ratings than the bringing down of Nixon. For a media outlet to be successful, their key people need to be perceived as celebrities. So, they glorify themselves in the ways they present the news and even in their self-criticism when they screw up. They even glorify themselves with awards. And, these days, they love to play their roles in Hollywood movies, further liquefying the boundaries between reality and fantasy.

They are the status quo with capped teeth and hair spray. They know that their opinions are imbibed by huge audiences. They are the puppet presenters of misinformation, propaganda, lies, deceit and commercialism. They preside over disasters and misconduct. They are the 6:00 o'clock and the 11:00 o'clock priests spouting their values along with the weather and sports.

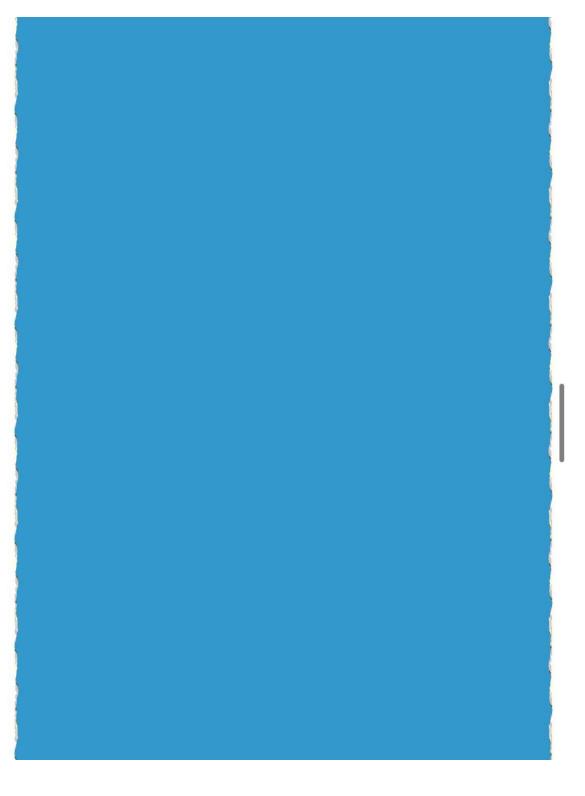
Their arrogance, their irresponsibility, their willingness to go with a story about which they have a preconceived agenda makes it easier for them to take my bait. weather and sports." And it certainly inspires me.

"They are the 6:00 o'clock and the 11:00 o'clock priests spouting their values along with the

But nothing that the media does makes what I do easier.

The word easy is misleading. I may make it look easy but it's actually quite difficult. I'm in competition with every politician and pr agent and the whole free world advertising/marketing/consumerism agenda. Everybody's got a story, a product, a service, or a philosophy and thou all want to be in the nous

FUN MEDIA FACTS The Seattle Post-Intelligencer rejected a ompuServe advertisemen Network, a pet project by hometown favorite Bill Gates.



prinosoprity and they all want to be in the news.

Given that I'm self-supporting and I pay for the execution of all my concepts which is expensive (there is no outside funding for what I do); I don't produce a commercial product which is salable in a gallery; I alienate many journalists who I am dependent upon to talk about the serious issues involved in the hoax; most people don't perceive the value of the prank as art -- and certainly not the journalists who have been humiliated by my performances, so I'm dismissed or trivialized or attacked; and I'm only as good as my next piece, none of it is easy. But I've always liked the difficulty and I enjoy the process. It's fun! And I hopefully have an effect on people's perceptions.

How do you see the Internet in terms of changing the media?

It's another delivery system. Now everyone is a commentator. So there's more to sift through. And people are not accountable. There's a lot more noise. There are a lot more viewpoints as well though. Which is great. As long as people remain objective, skeptical, and critical in their thinking.

I'm sure it's scaring main stream media who are fearful of losing their advertising audience and revenues.

Are there any journalists who you respect?

No comment.

FUN MEDIA FACTS

When the Center for th Study of Commercialis

"Dictating Content: How Advertising Pressure Can Corrupt a Free Press"

documenting dozens of examples of advertiser

censorship in the media, only 2 out of 200 media outlets invited to the pres

conference showed up. The Washington Post and Washington Times both covered the conference, The Post did not run the story, and Times ran one but would

nd Times ran one but won not name advertisers responsible for the censorship.

> I've just finished Neil Postman's book entitled "How to Watch TV News", and he brings up one interesting point about TV news. He says that the majority of the people you see bringing us our local news are more or less actors with some journalistic background. They are not expert reporters who got their jobs based on the merit of their work as journalists, but more for their look or personality. I always found it interesting how TV news stations take pride on the top quality reporters they have, yet all of the people you see bringing us the news are good looking. Are we to believe that the most qualified people for the job just so happen to also be photogenic? If you had to say, what percentage of what we see on our local news is respected journalism and what percentage is pure, well orchestrated entertainment?

There's not enough entertainment value for my taste. And it's becoming increasingly more difficult to satiate people's appetites for the bizarre, the horrific, and the sexational. Just to be a good looking talking head isn't good enough. I envision a "Totally Nude News Show" to please the audience. The "Totally Nude News Show" could have sexual acts during the presentation of the news -- on betern

presentation of the news -- on hetero, bi and homosexual channels. The weather woman could have the weather map projected onto various parts of her naked body as she moves around and suggestively discusses the weather in the country. Hot in the South; cool and perky up North. Sports news could be more combative, with commentators engaging in nude mud wrestling as they give us the score. Give us hard sex with the hard news.

And we need midgets on TV news. People love midgets because they are fun to watch, photogenic and unpredictable. (*Laughing*). What changes would you like to see main stream media make?

I don't want the media to make any changes. I'm very happy to use them as a vehicle to reach a larger audience with my messages about humanity's inherent foolishness and self destructiveness. I appreciate their gullibility, their irresponsibility, their neptitude, their smugness, their self-serving, contemptible attitudes, and their egotism. If it weren't for that, I wouldn't be successful in fooling them. I'd have to go back to being just a fine arts painter.

Seriously though, I don't have a lot of hope for mainstream media unless peoples' consciousness and attitudes change. You can't just blame the media. We are the consumers who support their activities. For the most part, they're giving the masses what they want.

I know you can't go into detail about your next project, just let us know when it hits, if we don't see it in the news first. Good luck.

THE END.

(A few weeks after we conducted this interview, Joey contacted us to inform on the successful completion of his "STOP BioPEEP" project.)







