

- LOGIN
- SIGNUP
- EMAIL
- CHAT
- FORUMS
- STORE

- ACTIVISM
- ALIENS
- CONSPIRACIES
- DRUGS
- ENTERTAINMENT
- ENVIRONMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- HISTORY
- HUMAN RIGHTS
- MEDIA
- MIND CONTROL
- PARANORMAL
- PEOPLE
- PHILOSOPHIES
- POLITICS
- SCIENCE
- SEX
- SPIRITUALITY
- TECHNOLOGY

- ABOUT
- NEWSLETTER
- HELP

Not Found

joey skaggs: media prankster superstar

by Alex Burns (alex@disinfo.com) - June. 02, 2001

New York City, 1976. The *Village Voice* advertises a "Cathouse for Dogs." For only \$50, your dog can visit a bordello and experience sexual pleasure with specially selected canines.

New York City, 1986. Ex-U.S. marine Joe Bones spearheads Fat Squad Commandos, detectives-for-hire whose mission is to enforce diets.

London, 1995. New Age philosopher Baba Wa Simba has journalists "roaring" for primal therapeutic effect.

Brisbane, 1998. Courageous activists expose a multinational eugenics conspiracy using poultry to target and eradicate DNA. Chickens everywhere "bok" with relief.

New York City, 2000. If you've felt that the Death Care Industry is a commercial scam targeting the vulnerable, have we got a Web site for you . . .

Joey Skaggs is a multimedia prankster, acknowledged as the Godfather of *Culture Jamming*. Since 1966 he has destabilized the "cognitive distortions" (hypocritical and stereotypical thinking, hype, prejudice) that media conglomerates spoon-feed the public.

Skagg's meticulously crafted 'hooks' have grabbed the attention of the world's most prestigious magazines, newspapers, wire agencies, and television programs. Entranced by his 'line' (elaborately staged guerilla communication, including faked interviews and staged events), gullible reporters swallow the bait. Skagg's documented 'sinkers' exposes their shoddy research, and the chimera of journalistic integrity.

His pranks are witty observations of American society's anthropological weirdness, pranks that reveal how the Fourth Estate conspire through editorial formulas to "dumb down" the postmodern mass-mind for corporate profit. Skaggs intuitively grasps that Carl Bernstein's warning of a "Stupid Society" has become a dark reality, a medium whose 'real-time' deadline makes fact checking obsolete.

'Hot-button' issues that Skaggs parodies migrate through society via infotainment *vectors* (tabloid media, cable television, the Internet), broadcast within pre-selected and limited frames of reference. Skaggs laid the groundwork for organizations such as [Dark](#) and [Adbusters](#).

Journalism sociologist Bruce McNair once described the new media environment as a *chaotic flow* model: "there are always other, opposing tendencies, other accounts and other interruptions existing in the *meme-pool*."

Skaggs has reminded us that politically motivated satire can be stranger than any corporate reality.

MORE INFORMATION

[Hoax! The Art Of Joey Skaggs](#)

A brief Joey Skaggs bio for a 1997 Hong Kong documentary.

[Stupid Death Tricks](#)

This *Salon* magazine article (May 31, 2000) by Jeff Stark explores Joey Skaggs's *Final Curtain* hoax, and its implications for online journalism. Stark's introduction is apt: "How a Web performance artist created a fake chain of theme-park

ITEM OF THE DAY



Abuse Your Illusions - the follow-up to *Everything You Know Is Wrong & You Are Being Lied To* is

in the store and every bit as essential. The long-awaited Disinformation DVD is in too! [>>Go](#)

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Not Found

cemeteries and embarrassed 39 newspapers, 19 radio stations, six TV stations, 10 magazines and 20 Web sites."

[Web Prank Turns Up DOA](#)

This *Wired News* article (May 19, 2000) by Lynn Burke features reactions to Joey Skaggs's *Final Curtain* prank, including comments by cultural critic Mark Dery, and *Profits of Death* author Darryl Roberts.

[Hoax In The Machine](#)

This *Seattle Weekly* article (May 25th - 31, 2000) by Angela Gunn offers the viewpoint of a Joey Skaggs collaborator on hoaxes: "Done right, it's a work of art; done wrong, it becomes reality."

[Calamity Gene](#)

This *Wired News* article (May 6, 1998) by Mark Spiegler exposes the *BioPEEP* genetic conspiracy hoax created by Joey Skaggs. Yes, we were fooled.

[Secret Prankster Fund Goes Public](#)

This *Wired News* article (April 8, 1997) by Mark Frauenfelder announces the arrival of (r)TMark, and draws a comparison to Joey Skaggs.

[Up In Smoke](#)

This *Salon* magazine article (May 3rd, 1999) by James Poniewozik is about the *Billboard Liberation Front*, but features a perceptive comment about Joey Skaggs and his milieu: "Skaggs shows a complex understanding of the workings, assumptions and prejudices of modern media and society, something a "Got Sperm?" billboard just doesn't quite nail."

[Conspiracy Weary](#)

This *SF Weekly Online* article (March 11, 1998) by Matt Smith is a critique of Joey Skaggs's *BioPEEP* hoax, suggesting that he is now "a champion slightly off his game . . . [he] hasn't exactly been batting 1,000."

[New York Prankster Makes April Fools Of Media](#)

This *CNN* article (April 1, 2000) reveals how the media were fooled again by Joey Skaggs, when they turned up at New York City's Fifth Avenue to cover a nonexistent April Fools Day parade. They retaliated by not mentioning his name, but instead writing, "the man is known for devising elaborate stories to fool the media in order to expose their fallibility."

[Joey Skaggs](#)

The *official* Web site of multimedia prankster Joey Skaggs, featuring archives (dating back to 1966), interviews, rants, articles, press coverage, and more. Highly recommended!

[The Final Curtain](#)

The Final Curtain was a hoax Disney-like memorial theme park for the dead, created in 1998 by Joey Skaggs. This satire of the Death Industry conveys Skaggs's genius at developing strange-yet-plausible concepts.

[Fade To Black Interviews: Joey Skaggs](#)

The *Fade to Black* Web site profiles Joey Skaggs' greatest pranks, and features an in-depth interview where Skaggs explains his modus operandi and

philosophy. Features biting insights into American media culture: "We learn our geography through war reports."

[\(r\)TMark](#)

On the surface, (r)TMark is a 21st century corporate consultancy at the forefront of the New Economy. These pranksters have studied Joey Skaggs' manifesto, and upped the ante.

[Billboard Liberation Movement](#)

Pioneers of outdoor advertising improvement, the Billboard Liberation Front has been raising hell for over twenty years. Learn about their philosophy and influential 'culture jamming' legacy.

[Culture Jamming: How To Make Trouble & Influence People](#)

This *ABC Radio National* briefing (October 18th, 1998) explores culture jamming from an Australian perspective, featuring prankster Joey Skaggs, *Adbusters* founder Kalle Lasn, Pauline Pantsdown, and others. Hosted by Ian Walker. RealAudio. 50 minutes.

[Culture Jamming: How To Make Trouble & Influence People: Transcript](#)

This *ABC Radio National* briefing (October 18th, 1998) transcript explores culture jamming from an Australian perspective, featuring prankster Joey Skaggs, *Adbusters* founder Kalle Lasn, Pauline Pantsdown, and others. RealAudio archive also available.

[Stop BioPEEP](#)

Joey Skagg's 1998 *BioPeep* hoax spoofed conspiracy themes and paranoia-tinged *Animal Liberation* grassroots activism - a little *too well* for the editor's pet guinea chicken.

[Law and Ordure: New York Does Its Doody](#)

This *High Times* article (December 8, 1999) by Preston Peet with Dean Latimer, covers a witty Joey Skaggs prank, attacking New York City Mayor Rudy "Il Duce" Guiliani's unique tactics to get homeless people off the streets. Peet's revelations about Skagg's collaboration with graffiti artist Stephen Powers offer many insights into the prankster at work.

[Pranks & Beans: You May Already Be A Wiener](#)

This *LA Weekly* article (May 26 - April 1, 2000) by Doug Harvey covers Joey Skaggs's *Final Curtain* prank, and contains many interesting thoughts and insights about the strained relationship between the High Art establishment, renegade 'culture jammers', and the media they expose. Harvey observes that several of Skagg's projects have subsequently taken on a life of their own.

[Toyota Comedy Festival](#)

Joey Skaggs appears at the 9th annual Toyota Comedy Festival (June 1-10, 2001) in New York City.

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