

JOEY SKAGGS ART OF THE PRANK



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U.S. \$3.50/CANADA \$5

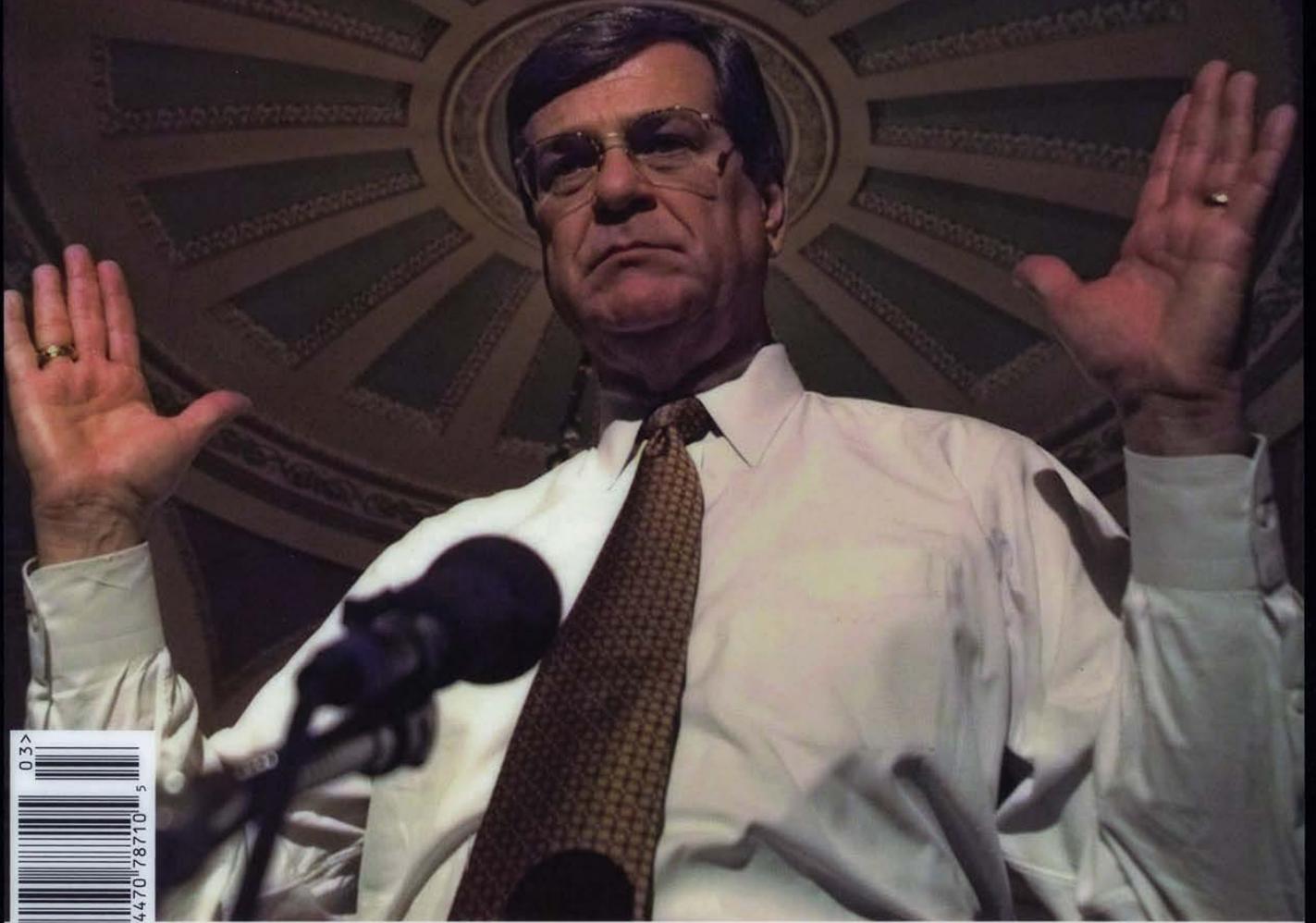
Extra!

The Magazine of FAIR

*UNSCOM Spying,
Contra Cocaine,
American Enterprise Institute*

March/April 1999 Vol. 12, No. 2

Trent Lott's Sex-Free Scandal



Lawrence Soley on Corporate Censorship

The Art of the Con

A notorious prankster uses hoaxes to expose the media

By Joey Skaggs

We're living in a time when it seems everything we see on the news is a bad joke: President Clinton and impeachment, Y2K and the end of the world, Viagra raising the dead, cloning your dead pet dog.

So how can a conscientious media prankster make a mark? When reality gets this strange, pranks are needed more than ever to jolt us into reexamining our values.

With the Internet's immediacy, its availability to anyone wishing to plant an idea, service or product for the world to consume, there's more opportunity than ever for both pranks and scams. Anyone can send an e-mail, create a rumor on Usenet, make a website and look official with very little effort or cost.

To me the prank is fine art. I use the immediacy of the news media as my medium. The gullibility of the media and the vulnerability of the public help me to communicate my ideas to a large audience. When I perpetrate a hoax I get media attention. I use that attention to express thoughts on issues I feel are important.

When I package a satire into a funny, sexually suggestive, controversial or highly technical wrapping, the media tend to fall for it hook, line and sinker. That's because I'm basically giving them what they want. A provocative story with great visuals that's outrageous yet plausible: a cathouse for dogs where you can get your dog sexually gratified for \$50; a portable confessional booth offering religion on the move for people on the go; an auction for celebrity sperm.

Why are my pranks—or any pranks, really—successful? I believe we are all predisposed to be conned. As children, we are conned into believing. Then we are conned into believing. The Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny, Santa Claus and the bogeyman occupy a great amount



of our consciousness. Then there is religious training, lessons of morality that require great leaps of faith.

The bottom line is, we're taught to suspend critical thinking and analysis and to believe what we're told. So we grow up conning ourselves as we look for answers to unanswerable questions and miracle cures for all of our ills. And, with the help of a less-than-responsible press whose corporate bot-

tom line frequently overrides sound journalistic judgment, we believe just about anything we see in the news.

Pranks vs. scams

For the most part, the kind of pranks that are being perpetrated via the mainstream news media and on the Internet are as shallow and vapid as the reality that surrounds us, or are outright scams for money. Take "ourfirst-

time.com," for example, a site mounted in July 1998 to promote two teenagers who were planning to lose their virginity with each other live online. It could have been a brilliant hoax—a great satire about our excessive fascination with the prurient and with voyeurism.

But it was a totally transparent scam for money. There were never any virgins who were going to consummate their relationship online. There was just a plan to collect \$5 per visit from hundreds of thousands of curious net surfers for weeks leading up to the great day. In other words, it wasn't a prank at all. Yes, it was a media manipulation. But its purpose was to rip off the vulnerable public it could have so beautifully satirized.

The media love this type of scam because they can righteously put it down, meanwhile sideswiping serious media activists, satirists and culture jammers who get lumped in with the scammers and con artists. The mainstream media do not want to differentiate between the two. They prefer to put down any attack on their credibility. Typically, they trivialize or ignore the intent of the media activist because acknowledging that they have been irresponsible or shallow undermines their credibility.

A good prank, however, attempts to shed light on an issue and to create social change. It is the manipulation of ideas and emotions in order to shift focus onto otherwise hidden agendas or social injustices. Using elements of truth, irony, humor and satire, a good prank is meant to target closed-mindedness, prejudice, hatred and unquestioning thinking. It deconstructs the status quo. It attacks the misuse of power by media, government, business and religion. A good prank is a smoke and mirror illusion that can change people's perceptions and make them realize that most of their reality is—smoke and mirrors.

I get e-mail every single day from wannabe pranksters, narcissists and revenge seekers. Electronic graffiti artists. They reach out to me as if I was the "Dear Abby" of pranks. They solicit my counsel on how to avenge a boss, humiliate a big brother or embarrass an irritating friend.

Sometimes I write back politely,

They Fell for Them All

• **Hippie Bus Tour to Queens** (1968)

To satirize the busloads of tourists who came to the East Village to gawk at the hippies, Joey Skaggs rented a Greyhound sight-seeing bus and took 60 bearded, beaded, camera-toting hippies on a tour of suburban Queens. He called it his "Cultural Exchange Tour."

• **Cathouse for Dogs** (1976)

A bordello for canines, a place to get your dog sexually gratified without the threat of pregnancy, staged for the media by supposed promoter Joey Skaggs, set off the media's mojo.

• **Celebrity Sperm Bank Auction** (1976)

Giuseppe Scaggoli (a.k.a. Joey Skaggs) created the Celebrity Sperm Bank. Unfortunately, the night before the first auction of celebrity sperm, the sperm was mysteriously stolen. So the auction was replaced by a press conference, and the Celebrity Sperm Bank was widely reported as a thriving new and controversial business by numerous print, television and radio media.

• **Metamorphosis—Cockroach Vitamin Pill** (1981)

"Roaches have been around for 350 million years," said entomologist Dr. Josef Gregor (a.k.a. Joey Skaggs). "They'll survive a nuclear holocaust. We have much to learn from them." Gregor, leader of a group called Metamorphosis, had bred a super strain of cockroaches, extracted their hormones, and made a cockroach vitamin pill that he said cured arthritis, acne, anemia and menstrual cramps—as well as making one invulnerable to high doses of nuclear radiation.

• **WALK RIGHT!** (1984)

"The Guardian Angels have the subways, we want the streets." So said Joseph Virgil Skaggs (a.k.a. Joey Skaggs), street vigilante, who, with his gang of black-clad commandos wearing WALK RIGHT! sweatshirts, patrolled the streets to get signatures on a petition to institute 66 rules of street etiquette. In a case of life imitating art, many of Guardian Angels' founder Curtis Sliwa's tales of heroism turned out to be made up.

• **The Fat Squad** (1986)

"You can hire us but you cannot fire us. Our commandos take no bribes." That was the motto of Joe Bones (a.k.a. Joey Skaggs), ex-U.S. Marine drill sergeant and founder of the Fat Squad, an organization created to rub out fat. Clients signed a contract to allow Bones' calorie cops to physically restrain them—whether on a date, at the job or at night in the bedroom—from breaking their diets.

• **Portofess** (1992)

A life-size confession booth on wheels, pedaled up 8th Avenue in New York to the 1992 Democratic convention, caused a media sensation. Skaggs was unrepentant.

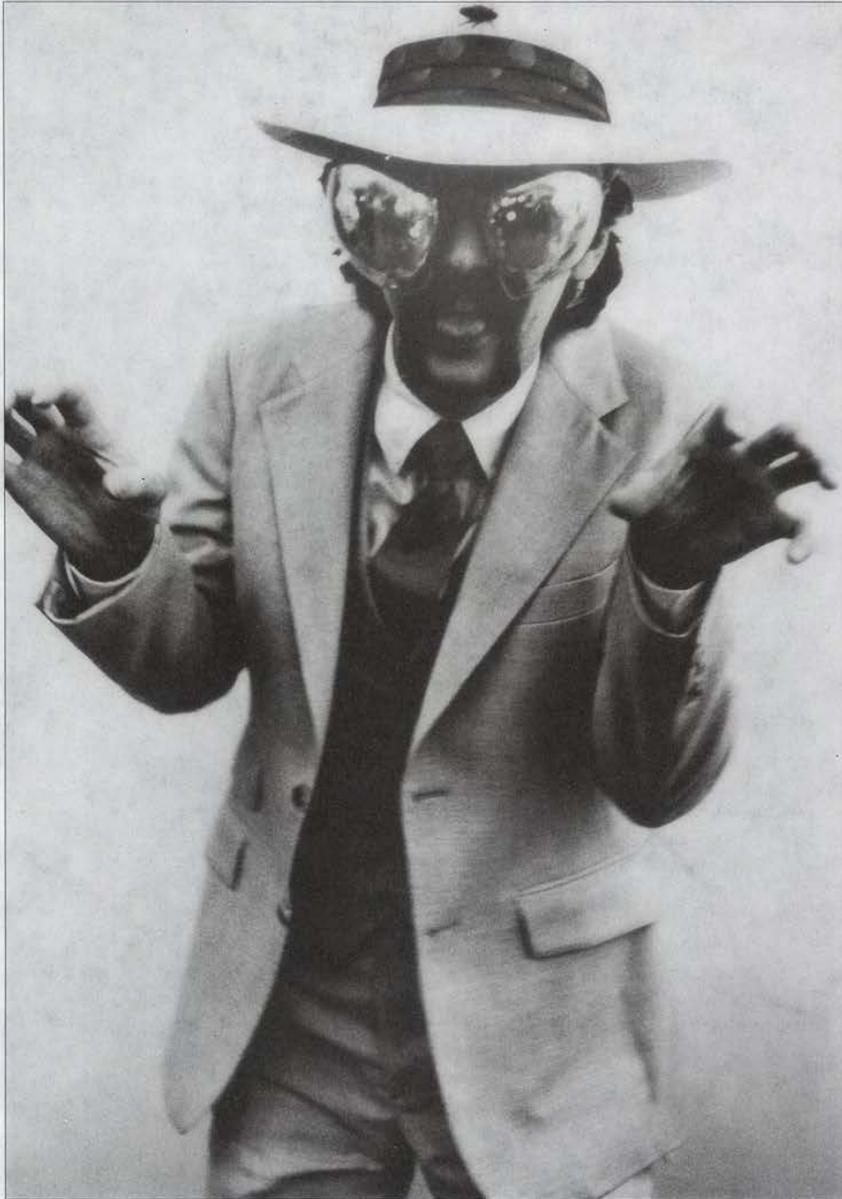
• **SEXONIX** (1993)

In 1993, Joseph Skaggs, Ph.D. (a.k.a. Joey Skaggs), artificial intelligence computer scientist specializing in the field of virtual reality, reported he had perfected the world's first sexual virtual reality apparatus. However, his plans to demonstrate it at an invention and gift show in Toronto were waylaid when the equipment was confiscated at the Canadian border by puritanical customs agents. But Dr. Skaggs was not deterred. As he said to the media, "Machinery may be put under lock and key, but the people's dreams may not." Skaggs took the ruse to cyberspace where the rest of the story played out.

• **The Solomon Project** (1996)

Do you believe that the judicial system is a joke? That there is no such thing as "equal justice for all"? That the courts are biased and racist? Dr. Joseph Bonuso (a.k.a. Joey Skaggs) created a solution. Working with over 150 scientists, judges and attorneys for over seven years, Dr. Bonuso and his team created the Solomon Project, a series of supercomputers that could render civil and criminal decisions with great speed, low cost and no prejudice, guaranteeing equal justice for all.

An overview of Joey Skaggs' hoaxes can be found at www.joeyskaggs.com.



explaining that this is not the nature of my work. I'm not into meaningless, stupid, vicious, vindictive acts of rage against people or institutions. Nor am I interested in delusional people who confuse their lack of conscience with some tweaked concept of anarchy, pulling off the equivalent of the burning-bag-of-poop-at-the-door trick on the Internet (i.e., the plethora of computer viruses). I challenge hoaxers to do something more meaningful, something that will rock the status quo.

Pranks have always been culturally important to society. And as our reality becomes more and more bizarre and seemingly less meaningful it's more

important than ever that effective pranks be perpetrated. So here's to bigger and better pranks that attempt to effect positive change. We have to be able to look at ourselves and laugh. ■

Joey Skaggs' hoaxes have been misreported as fact by such media outlets as the New York Times, Washington Post, Boston Globe, Chicago Tribune, Miami Herald, Wall Street Journal, AP, UPI, Reuters, Scripps Howard, Knight Ridder, U.S. News & World Report, Ms., New York, People, CNN, ABC, CBS and NBC. Skaggs is also a media consultant, college instructor, international lecturer on culture-jamming and media activism, and a fine arts painter and sculptor. He is, of course, working on another hoax.

Local Media Activist Contacts

FAIR does not have local chapters, but we do encourage people to work together for media diversity and accountability. The following are some of the many individuals and groups doing local media activism that FAIR works with. If you would like to coordinate your local media activism, please call FAIR, 212-633-6700, ext. 302.

ARIZONA Phoenix

Arizona Media Action:
Dave Winkler (602-996-5823)

CALIFORNIA Los Angeles

Jim Horwitz (310-445-9109)

San Francisco

We Interrupt This Message:
Kim Deterline (415-905-4527)

COLORADO Denver

Rocky Mountain Media Watch:
Paul Klite (303-832-7558)

ILLINOIS Chicago

Chicago Media Watch:
Dan Kaplan (312-828-0350)

MAINE

Greenfire Media Watch:
Traci Hickson (207-288-5061)

MINNESOTA Minneapolis

Mary Shepard (612-454-3918)

NEW YORK New York

New York Free Media Alliance
(212-969-8636)

Ithaca

Will Burbank (607-272-7555)

NORTH CAROLINA Chapel Hill

Balance & Accuracy in Journalism:
David Kirsh (919-968-4062)

PENNSYLVANIA Pittsburgh

Jerry Starr (412-341-1967)

TEXAS

Dallas

B.J. Armstrong (817-295-1602)

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Sarah Durand (202-544-0796)

**RE
SEARCH**

PRANKS!



DEVIOUS DEEDS AND MISCHIEVOUS MIRTH FROM:

◆ TIMOTHY LEARY ◆ ABBIE HOFFMAN ◆ MARK PAULINE ◆
KAREN FINLEY ◆ JOHN WATERS ◆ JEFFREY VALLANCE
◆ JELLO BIAFRA ◆ BRUCE CONNER ◆ PAUL KRASSNER ◆
JOHN CALE ◆ HENRY ROLLINS ◆ BOYD RICE ◆ JOHN GIORNO
◆ MONTE CAZAZZA ◆ JOEY SKAGGS ◆ JOE COLEMAN ◆
EARTH FIRST! ◆ BOB ZOELL ◆ ALAN ABEL ◆ HARRY KIPPER
◆ CARLO McCORMICK ◆ FRANK DISCUSSION ◆ AND MANY MORE ◆

Prank [obs. *prank* to play tricks]: trick; a malicious act; a mildly mischievous act; practical joke; a ludicrous act.

Prank to deck, adorn. M.E. *pranken*, to trim, allied to obs. E. *prink*, to trim. *Prink* is a nasalised form of *prick*; see further under *Prick*. See also *pronken*, to show off, shine, strut, parade, to display one's dress, *pronckeprinken*, to glitter in a fine dress, *prunk*, show, parade, *pryken*, to make a show or display.

prank a trick (E.). An act done to shew off, a trick to make people stare; from *Prank*.

Prank Also *pranque*, *pranck*, *pranke*. Origin unascertained.

a. A trick, an act done to show off. A fold, pleat, as in the figurative sense of 'wrinkle'. A trick, a frolic. In early use, a trick of malicious or mischievous nature; a trick or action deserving of reprobation; a deed of wickedness. [ex: *This was not the first of his pranks which he (the Devil) played upon mankind after the flood.*]

b. A trick of magic, conjuring, or the like; in early times to deceive, later to surprise or amuse. [ex: *Either juggling or Magicall pranks practised by the Conjurors or Priests.*] c. A trick of a frolicsome nature, or one intended to make sport; a

mad frolic; a practical joke. [ex: *Who in all his purposes and practices, playeth pranckes of puerilitie and childishness.*

... see the child, with his thousand pretty pranks, commanded by every sight and sound ... The pranks are not those of healthy schoolboys.]

d. Said of capricious or frolicsome actions or movements of animals, and fig. of erratic actions of machines. [ex: *We appeal to observation, whether all the various machines and utensils would now and then play odd pranks and capricio's quite contrary to their proper structures and the designs of the artificers ... The Cat is reported to have played several Pranks above the Capacity of an ordinary Cat.*]

Prank *Prancing*, *capering*.

Prank To play pranks or tricks, formerly sometimes wicked or mischievous, now usually in frolic; to sport. [ex: *I prank with one, I use craftye and subtyll maner towardes hym ... The little rays of sin That prank with the damask vein of the cheek ... A little wind, born in the gorge below, was pranking with the quaking asp leaves.*]

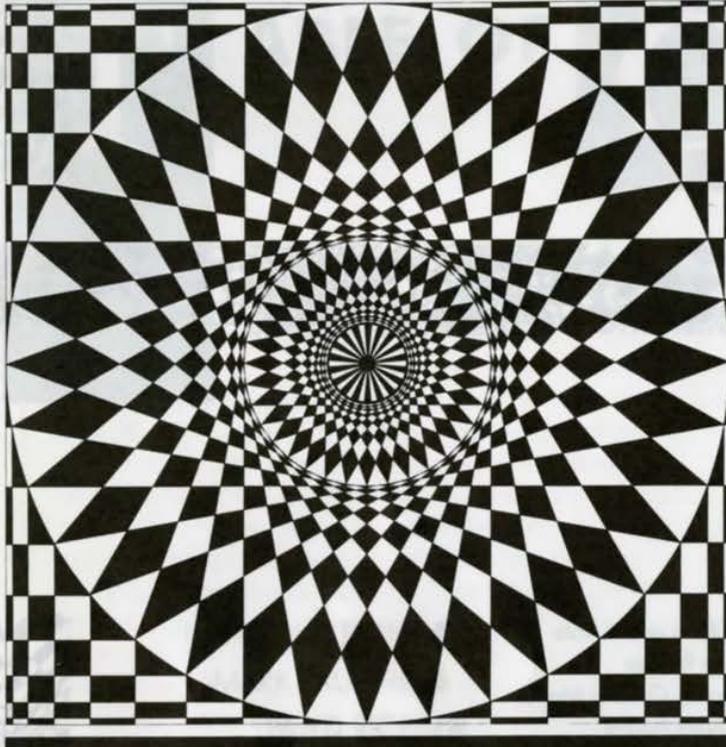
Prank [appears early on 16th c, origin obscure] *v.* (in various

senses, esp. with suggestion of display or arrogance); to caper, to dance.

Prank a. To dress, or deck in a gay, bright, or showy manner; to decorate; to deck oneself out, dress oneself up. [ex: *She spends halfe a day in pranking her selfe if she be invited to any strange place ... As willing as you are to prancke your selves in a lookinge Glasse.*] **b.** To dress up. **c.** To deck, adorn; to brighten or set out with colours; to spangle. In various constructions, e.g. to prank (the field) with flowers, to prank (the garden or field) as a flower.

Prankful Full of pranks; mischievous, tricky; frolicsome. Hence **Prankfulness**. [ex: *Rather wounding by an unbounded prankfulness, than by a wish to inflict pain.*]

Prankish Of the nature of a prank; inclined to pranks. [ex: *My partner dear in many a prankish deed ... She had quite dropt her prankish airs.*] Stories concerning mischievous and prankish children.] Hence **Prankishness**, trickiness, frolicsomeness; addiction to pranks. [ex: *She prankishly avoided him ... If he were a very young man, we might be indulgent to this prankishness.*]



PRANKS. According to the *Merriam-Webster New Collegiate Dictionary*, a prank is a "trick . . . a mildly mischievous act . . . a practical joke . . . a ludicrous act." The *best* pranks invoke the imagination, poetic imagery, the unexpected and a deep level of irony or social criticism—such as Boyd Rice's presentation of a skinned sheep's head on a silver platter to Betty Ford, First Lady of the United States. Great pranks create synaesthetic experiences which are unmistakably exciting, original, and reverberating, as well as *creative, metaphorical, poetic* and *artistic*. If these criteria be deemed sufficient, then pranks can be considered as constituting an art form and genre in themselves.

However slighted by Academia, pranks are not without cul-

tural and historical precedent. A casual survey of art of the twentieth century reveals a neglected galaxy of shining star prank-events which forever altered the path of future creative activity, such as Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (a painting of prostitutes), Duchamp's *Fountain* (a urinal which he labeled "sculpture"), and Warhol's successful marketing of paintings depicting gory car crashes as six-figure "high art."

A prank connotes *fun, laughter, jest, satire, lampooning, making a fool of someone*—all light-hearted activities. Thus do pranks camouflage the sting of deeper, more critical denotations, such as their direct challenge to all verbal and behavioral *routines*, and their undermining of the sovereign authority of words, language, visual images, and social conventions in general. Regardless of specific manifestation, a prank is always an evasion of *reality*. Pranks are the *deadly enemy* of reality. And "reality"—its description and limitation—has always been the supreme control trick used by a society to subdue the lust for freedom latent in its citizens.

From the very onset of social interactions pranks play their part, instructing and enlightening the child toward the realization that *things are never what they seem*. Calling into question inherently dubious concepts such as "reality," "trust," "belief," "obedience," and "the social contract," pranks occasionally succeed in implanting a profound and lasting distrust of all social conventions and institutions.

Unfortunately, pranks are usually identified with—and limited to—pre-adult stages of development. At the point of "adulthood" the multiplication of mischief must cease; youths are supposed to "grow out of" the need to perpetrate pranks as they accept society's restriction of their spirit through the progressive conventionalization of their behavior. The role model of the *adult prankster* is a scarce archetype indeed. But—pranks *can* continue until one's dying breath: when he died, the great Surrealist Andre Breton was taken to the cemetery in a moving van.

What makes a prank "bad"? In America the outstanding socially-sanctioned prank is the college fraternity *hazing*, which means "to harass by exacting unnecessary or disagreeable work, to harass by banter, ridicule, or criticism." Usually characterized not only by unoriginality but by *conventionalized* cruelty, these pointless humiliations do nothing to raise consciousness or alter existing power relationships. They are deeds which only further the *status-quo*; they only perpetuate the

acceptance of and submission to *arbitrary authority*, or abet existing hierarchical inequities. Basically these include all pranks readily recognizable as "cliches"—those which contribute no new poetic imagery.

The word "prank" is strangely absent from academic psychology, sociology and anthropology texts which presumably exist to document and classify the full range of human behavior in this world. A recent look at the indexes of literally a hundred books in these categories revealed *no* entries! Yet even a cursory perusal of world myths and written literature will substantiate the prank as a significant, consciousness-raising, and often *pivotal* event in the ethical and creative development of the individual in society. Examples range from Coyote and Raven in American Indian mythology to the legends of Hermes and Prometheus.

A possible explanation for this mysterious lacuna may lie in the way genuinely poetic/imaginative pranks resist facile categorization, and transcend inflexible (and often questionable) demarcations between legality and illegality, good and bad taste, and right and wrong social conduct. Society imposes a grid of habit-forming pathways on its denizens to "produce results" without lateral detouring. Obviously, a minimum of ritualized language and behavior to facilitate the flow of goods and services for survival is *necessary*. However, this minimum has been well exceeded long ago. Pranks blast the rigidified politeness and behavior patterns which bespeak sleepwalkers acting on automatic pilot. They attack the fundamental mechanisms of a society in which all social/verbal intercourse functions as a means toward a future *consumer exchange*, either of goods or experience. It is possible to view *every* "entertainment" experience marketed today either as an act of consumption, a prelude to an act of consumption, or both.

Pranks challenge all aspects of "the social contract" which have ossified. Their power derives from exploration and elucidation of the inarticulate, confused areas surrounding society. They probe the territory of the *taboo*, which has always been concerned with sex and death. This shadow area, which has spawned most of the creative breakthroughs worth preserving, is also that area which society—striving above all to preserve its status quo—neglects, rejects and ignores, principally through the process of cultural censorship. Yet "true art is always there—where no one is waiting for it . . . Art does not come and lie in the beds we make for it. It slips away as soon as its name is uttered; it likes to preserve its incognito. Its best moments are when it forgets its very name." (Jean Dubuffet)

Pranks are most admirable when they evoke a *liberation of expression* . . . and challenge the *authority of appearances*. While almost all pranks mock or undermine kneel-to-authority conditioning, some do more, by virtue of disclosing more levels of black humor and metaphor, or expanding our notions of reality by gifting us with a bizarre image or metamorphosis. At a single stroke a prank can dissect an intricate tissue of artifice, exposing a rigid behavioral structure underneath.

By unhinging the context for expectation, pranks explode the patterning which narrows and shrinks down our imaginative potential. What distinguishes a painting from wallpaper, or literature from stock market reports, is the tearing and ripping apart of old forms and structures to create new perceptions which renew and refresh life itself. All art attempts to rid life of banality; to expunge the *habituation effect* whose cause is "daily living."

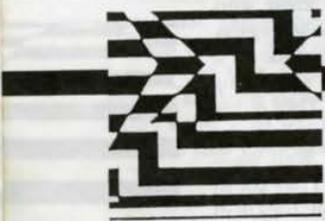
Obedience to language and image must continually be challenged, if we are to stay "alive." The best pranks research and probe the boundaries of the occupied territory known as "society" in an attempt to redirect that society toward a vision of life grounded not in dreadful necessity, but rather, *continual poetic renewal*. (A society whose *exchange value* consisted in poetic images and humor rather than dollars can barely be *imagined* at this stage of world evolution.) Pranks function to evoke the parallel *Land of Make Believe*, that realm of perpetual surprise and delight where endless possibilities for fun and pleasure depend upon circumvention of habit and cliché. From their Shadow-world, pranks cast their Funhouse Mirror reflection of our workaday world. Ultimately, the territory signposted by pranks may represent our single supremely tangible freedom.

—V. Vale and A. Juno

**J****OEY****S****KAGGS**

Probably the most famous television prankster alive today is NYC artist Joey Skaggs, who uses the media as a painter uses a canvas. His sociopolitical satires—put-ons—have been front page stories over the world for the past two decades. All along his objective has always been to force people to question and enter into dialogue on vital issues concerning truth in news reportage; morality, sensationalism and violence; the effects the media have on public opinion and taste; and ways viewers can decipher media more effectively. In addition to international TV, radio, newspaper and magazine coverage, he's been featured on numerous US television shows, including Phil Donahue, NBC's Today Show, The Merv Griffin Show, Entertainment Tonight, PM Magazine, and Ripley's Believe It Or Not.

A former instructor of Media Communications at New York's School of Visual Arts, currently Joey Skaggs lectures at schools around the country (write 107 Waverly Place, NYC 10011 for a brochure). He was interviewed at his New York City office by Andrea Juno.



■ **JOEY SKAGGS:** Let me tell you what I do in a rambling, non-sequential order. I was born October 4, 1945. My mother is a Brooklyn Italian and my father is a hillbilly from Kentucky. I'm the oldest child in a family of four children: three brothers and one sister. I'm a New York Italian cowboy. I went to the High School of Art and Design on 57th St. & 2nd Avenue; I went to the Art Students League; and I went to a school which I won't give credit to—having been kicked out. I also went to the School of Visual Arts, eventually got a degree and taught there for a number of years.

As a child I always knew I was an artist and therefore didn't have to come to terms with "who am I, and what do I want to be when I grow up?" I always aspired to be an artist, and I was a gifted child. I've always been and always will be a painter. I'm an imaginary landscape painter; I've gone from 32' gigantic triptychs to the 4"x 6" miniatures I've been doing recently to be able to work quickly and move on to another concept.

But . . . being a painter was never enough for me, because I have other things I want to say. And as a creative person I don't want to say them through a painting. I don't want to write "SCREW YOU" on a painting; I don't want to write "HYPOCRISY" on a painting. There are artists who choose words like these to write on a painting, but that is not what I paint. Therefore, I needed other mediums to express myself with.

As a very angry young artist in the '60s, I chose performance as a medium. Pieces such as these weren't called performance pieces then, they were called "happenings," and they were usually done in loft spaces or any place that allowed them to happen.

I had a very unhappy childhood, which I don't want to get into. Fortunately, going to the High School of Art and Design and being recognized as having talent, plus having a

support system outside my immediate family was a real salvation for me. Actually, being talented was a salvation for me. Through my creativity I had other ways of dealing with problems at home.

Coming from what I perceived as hypocrisy and injustice in my own personal life—being forced to adhere to certain notions which I didn't agree with—I as an individual decided that I could strike out at hypocrisy and injustice *creatively*.

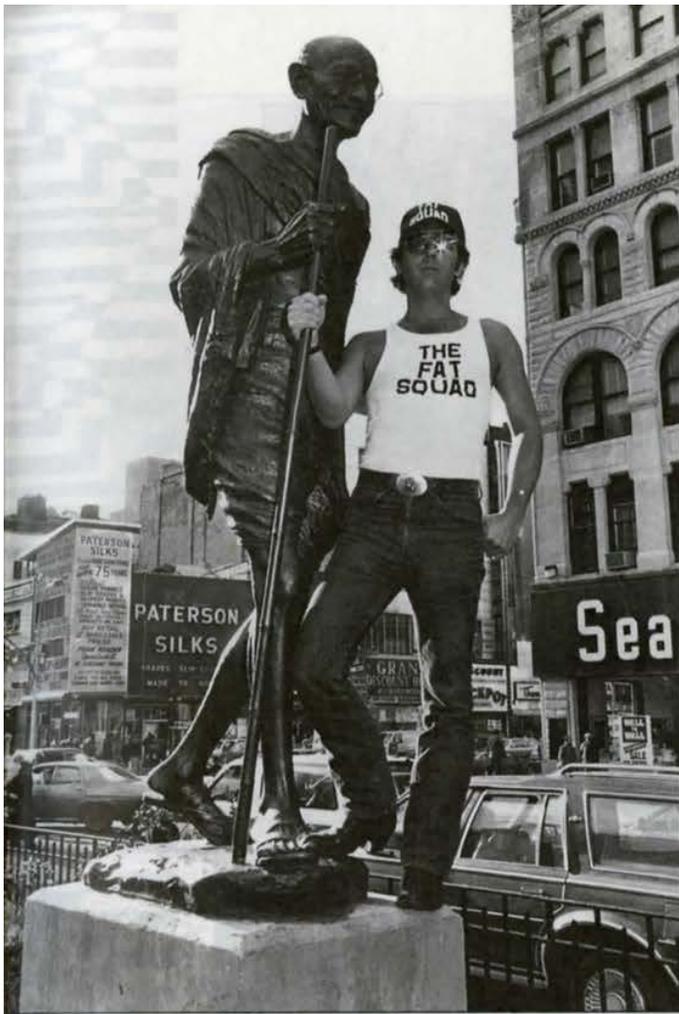
■ **ANDREA JUNO:** Tell us about your first performance.

■ **JS:** Rather than blowing up Mobil Oil stations or throwing bricks through bank windows, I constructed a 10', 250

I had concepts that I thought would make a statement. I was using the media as a medium. Rather than sticking with oil paint, the media became my medium; I got involved with the phenomenon of the media and communication as my art.

pound crucifix, and sculpted a figure on the crucifix which utilized a real American Indian skull with real human hair and a barbed-wire crown, and I cast my own hands in hydrocal. It was a combination of metal, wood, hydrocal and plaster-of-paris, and the piece had a huge cock between its legs.

I dragged it out on Easter Sunday, 1966, in Tompkins Square Park on the Lower East Side where I lived—I had a studio on Avenue B. This was before the term "hippie" was



Joey Skaggs with Mahatma Gandhi in Washington Square Park, NYC. Photo: Bobby Neel Adams.

coined, when we were still called "beatniks" in the press.

It was quite a provocative, controversial act. And it enraged, amused, confused and provoked many responses from people. The piece was attacked by a group of youths who were quite annoyed by the philosophical (no, I don't think they got the philosophical)—*physical* reality of seeing not a sweet pink Jesus, but a tortured, decayed figure on a cross with his genitalia exposed. And the police came. This was Easter Sunday in a very eclectic neighborhood, with Ukrainian, Slavic, Polish, Puerto Rican people along with the beatniks, the hipsters.

I had a contingency of friends there who all helped out. The piece was dragged away and given sanctuary at St Marks-in-the-Bowery Church. Father Michael Allen was the minister. He frequently held poetry readings, plays, and numerous people including Allen Ginsberg gave performances there. Father Allen had visited my studio and I had told him what I was going to do. He told me I should expect trouble and that the piece could be taken to his church. I was grabbed by the police, detained, and given a summons. And I was protected from the crowd by friends.

To jump ahead of myself, for four consecutive Easters I dragged out this iconoclastic, provocative sculpture. The last year was 1969. And this time I dragged it up 5th Avenue on my back, wearing a black robe (I had long hair and a beard) through the Easter Day Parade up to the doors of St

Patrick's Cathedral, where I attempted to drag it up the steps through the cathedral and drop it in front of the altar. This was my own personal statement of anger against the hypocrisy of the church.

I had told friends what I intended to do, and they were there to photograph it and try to protect me as well. I anticipated that it would be a reenactment of 2000 years ago, and of course it was. The crowd jeered, "Kill him! Kill him!" and the police (like the Roman soldiers) grabbed me, kicked me to the ground, and stomped on the sculpture. They made me pick it up; they prodded me and made me haul it to the paddy wagon. A friend came up and helped me carry the cross.

At the last second I bolted and ran down the street, jumped into a taxicab at a red light and got away, leaving the sculpture by the police paddy wagon. I'd anticipated that I was going to get into this kind of trouble, so I had made a duplicate of the original which I still have. What the police smashed was a copy of the cross.

■ AJ: How did the press react?

■ JS: It was front page news in the *East Village Other*; it got media attention. Because of that, I had a sense of my own power. Now, when you are a repressed person, when you've suffered injustices, there's a lot of anger. Some people find ways of venting that anger that are destructive to themselves; some people dissipate it by being neurotic or psychotic, etc.

But many years ago I was inspired by reading about a French avant-garde group of the 1890's; a philosophical, esoteric group of people who called themselves Pataphysicians. Alfred Jarry—he wrote *Ubu Roi*—was a Pataphysician. I think they created a philosophical joke which got international attention: Pataphysics. Pataphysics is to metaphysics what metaphysics is to physics, only Pataphysics extends in either direction. *Pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions.*

What does that mean? Well, what is art? Art is many things to many people, and one of the things it can be is an

The response was unbelievable. I had people willing to pay fifty dollars to have their dog sexually gratified, as well as people who came "out of the closet"—people who wanted to have sex with dogs, people who wanted to watch their dog having sex with another human being . . .

imaginary concept that you look toward expressing. So you create an imaginary problem, then you try to solve it. I have this idea, and now I'm going to execute the idea (imaginary problem, imaginary solution). Isn't art imaginary problems with imaginary solutions?

I was also inspired by other works I read, like a little story by Rene Daumal [to paraphrase]: "Once upon a time there was a miserable man who lived with his miserable old mother who made miserable meals in a cold little miserable house, and he had a miserable job with a miserable boss and was paid miserable wages. If he wanted to, he could have transformed it all into a Kingdom, and he could have been a King, and his mother could have been the Queen Mother,

and his boss could have been the Jester. But he didn't. And he died a miserable, miserable death. He *was* the world's greatest magician. But he never knew it."

The world is full of such self-made victims. When you think about that, you think about all the people who don't know how or are afraid to tap into, recognize, encourage, and nurture their own powers . . . Just because your history as a child made you a victim, you don't have to *continue* being one. You don't have to be a self-made victim just because you were the victim of abuse or stupidity by your parents or by society.

So, I decided that I could tap into my own power and make a stand. And being arrested and being beaten by police or by a crowd was nothing compared to the pains that I had endured as a child. I was quite willing to put it on the line and make a stand for what I believed in, and to creatively say, "SCREW YOU; I'M NOT BUYING YOUR LIES!"—which I did. And to threaten people—which I did. So my earlier works really were confrontational in a provocative way, which did endanger me.

In the '60s I rented a Greyhound sightseeing bus, filled it with 60 hippies and gave them a tour of Queens. I called it my Cultural Exchange Program. They reacted to us like we weren't supposed to be there, yet it was okay for straights and suburbanites and out-of-towners to come to the East Village with Instamatics and point them at long-haired bearded, beaded people.

As another example of my work in the '60s, I built a life-size Vietnamese village. It portrayed a Vietnamese Nativity. I spent months in the construction, and on Christmas I trucked it up to Central Park, and with actors dressed as American soldiers I led an attack on the Vietnamese village (as a statement against our involvement in Vietnam). I had been on the radio a couple of nights in advance, and made an announcement that I was doing something in Central Park on Christmas. Of course the police were there in great numbers, and numerous people were arrested.

Also in the '60s I constructed obscene, grotesque Statues of Liberty with dismembered baby bodies, and set them out on the Fourth of July as another protest against the war in Vietnam.

Another time in the '60s I rented a Greyhound sightseeing bus, filled it with 60 hippies and gave them a tour of Queens. I called it my Cultural Exchange Program. That was more of a joke, an ironic reversal, than a provocative prank, but at the time it was provocative because it threatened the people in Queens. They screamed, "We're being invaded!" They reacted to us like we weren't supposed to be there, yet it was okay for straights and suburbanites and out-of-towners to come to the East Village with Instamatics and point them at long-haired bearded, beaded people.

■AJ: *Right—Queens is very suburban.*

■JS: *Queens is Suburbia.* So I took hippies to Suburbia and pointed at the squares, at the people they left behind; toward the attached houses and the semi-attached houses and the Bowl-O-Rama; people mowing their lawns, washing their



Easter, late 60s in NYC: "I dragged this cross up Fifth Avenue to the doors of St. Patrick's Cathedral. This was my own personal statement of anger against the hypocrisy of the church. The police (like the Roman soldiers) grabbed me, kicked me to the ground, and stomped on the sculpture."



cars and reading the paper. That was my Cultural Exchange Program.

Well, that made the front page of every major newspaper—AP [Associated Press] picked it up. I did *The Today Show*. It was an enormously successful media piece.

There are other things I did in the '60s. For example, there was a woman whose name was Francine Godfried. Francine's claim to fame was that she was endowed with 44" mammary glands. She became a national news phenomenon for over a week because thousands of Wall Street workers would stand on top of automobiles to see Francine Godfried and her tits go to lunch. I thought that was ludicrous, so I built a 50' brassiere with a black bra and two red hearts on



"Cathouse For Dogs:
Now, for the first time, for
fifty dollars you could get
your dog sexually grati-
fied. The ASPCA sent out
armed investigators to get
me. ABC's documentary
[on me] was nominated
for an Emmy as the best
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poenaed by the Attorney
General for illegally run-
ning a Cathouse For
Dogs."

each cup for nipples, and I attempted to fasten it around the Statue of Liberty. I failed at doing that, and then stretched it across the U.S. Treasury Building (which was the first United States Capital) on Valentine's Day. The wind billowed it out. The Wall Street workers got incensed and attacked the brassiere, ripping it to shreds along with the police. There were other things, but that gives you an idea of what I was doing in the sixties.

I made isolated news stories, but these things were not called art. These events were never attributed to the same person. No one made the connection that it's Joey Skaggs *the artist*, a socio-political satirist who is making comments about us and holding up a mirror to society. That was not the nature of the press. The press called me a beatnik, a hippie, a Yippie, a radical revolutionary—whatever was the pigeon-hole at the moment. But all the time I was always an artist.

I recognize the power of the press from having been directly involved in it. It's easy to recognize it even when you're not directly involved, but when it's happening to *you*—when your intent, content, and techniques are totally misinterpreted, twisted and editorialized, and lost, destroyed, or purposely twisted into another direction—then you see the power of it all. I not only saw it, but I was angered by it, and I decided that also in part I wanted to point that out.

So I started doing hoaxes to purposefully make a commentary about people. I thought humor was a great way of making people think, rather than hitting them over the head with something. I also wanted to point out the inadequacies and dangers of an irresponsible press.

■ AJ: *How aware were you of the concept of media manipulation when you got on the front pages for the Queens bus tour?*

■ JS: It was not accidental; it was by design. I had concepts that I thought would make a statement. *I was using the media as a medium.* Rather than sticking with oil paint, the media became my medium; I got involved with the phenomenon of the media and communication as my art.

In 1976, I ran an advertisement in the *Village Voice* which read:

CATHOUSE FOR DOGS

featuring a savory selection of hot bitches. From pedigree (Fifi, the French Poodle) to mutts (Lady the Tramp). Handler and Vet on duty. Stud and photo service available. No weirdos, please. Dogs only. By appointment. Call 254-7878.

I also wrote a press release about my new establishment, the Cathouse For Dogs: if your dog graduated from obedience school, if it was his birthday, if you were embarrassed to come home and find him humping a pillow, or fearful of having a party because your dog would mount your company's legs—since there were cemeteries for dogs, restaurants for dogs, clothing stores for dogs—all the amenities of life except the one that a dog would enjoy the most, now for the first time for fifty dollars you could get your dog sexually gratified.

This was not a mating service for the purpose of breeding; this was purely a sexual pleasure service. We had a wonderful bevy of bitches. We used a drug called Estro-dial to artificially induce a state of heat into our bitches who would naturally only come into heat every six months. You or your dog could choose any one of the bitches—our vet would shoot her up—she'd be ready to go, and you could

Realizing, with my limited funds and limited imagination what I'm capable of doing on an international level, just imagine what people who have other intents, with a lot more money, brains, time, and other motivations are doing, have done, and will continue to do! It becomes a very frightening reality.

have a drink, watch and relax, or have a photo taken. And if we had a bitch who was in a natural state of heat we would administer a contraceptive called Ova-ban, so your dog would have no fear of being a father.

The response was *unbelievable*. I had people willing to pay fifty dollars to have their dog sexually gratified, as well as people who came "out of the closer"—people who wanted to have sex with dogs, both male and female; people who wanted to watch their dog having sex with another human being, and it went on like that.

I waited for the press, and I didn't have to wait long—the media wanted to see this. I got together 25 actors and 15 dogs and staged *A Night In A Cathouse For Dogs* for the media. I had, for example, an actress dressed in a red dress with a red bow in her hair come out with a Saluki hound with a red sweater and red bow, and parade it in front of the male dogs being held by actors posing as customers. I, as the announcer, would say, "This is Sarah and Luba. Luba is a two-year-old Saluki hound. She has a preference for Dobermans. She's almost a virgin," and I went on like this. I had a phony veterinarian present, and I gave a lecture on dog copulation technique complete with photographs. I had a questionnaire that the fake customers would fill out: how old is your dog, has it been inoculated for rabies or distemper, do they have a certificate, why are they getting their dog laid, and so on.

Just doing a hoax is not the total performance. It's not the end of the piece or the objective. What's more important, and more difficult to do, is to get the media to come back to allow me to say why and what it means. It's more difficult than to get them to initially fall for it.

The media were there—they were the only ones who weren't actors—and they just took it hook, line and sinker. *Midnight Blue* from Manhattan's cable Channel J, which was Alex Benner and Al Goldstein and his crew, who have videotaped every perverse sexual situation in the area, were totally grossed out by mine! They believed it. The *Soho News* ran a campaign against me. I incited the ASPCA, The Bureau of Animal Affairs, the NYPD vice squad, the Mayor's Office, and various religious and humane organizations who all took up the campaign to put me out of business, and I became the whoremaster of New York.

ABC called and wanted to do a documentary on me. I refused to allow them to see the cathouse for dogs because I didn't want to go through the *production* problem again. Every hoax I do is like doing a film or a theater piece or a commercial. It's conceived, written, produced, directed, staged, acted; there are locations, props—it's very complicated. Rather than do that every time some other media source wanted to see the Cathouse, I provided them with a videotape of the dogs humping.

ABC did what's called a wrap-around: the interview before and after, and interviewing other people; but the key to their documentary was the footage I provided them of the performance of the Cathouse For Dogs. Well, ABC interviewed me in Washington Square Park and I gave them an elaborate interview. They went out and interviewed the ASPCA, they interviewed a well-known veterinarian who was adamantly opposed to my use of drugs to induce a state of heat in the bitches, and so on.

■ AJ: *What about the ASPCA?*

■ JS: They sent out armed investigators to get me. They put up a reward poster in my hallway offering a \$200 reward for anyone who would turn me in for abusing animals. The police and various people from city agencies (in addition to the ordinary customers who phoned) were calling, all trying to get dates for their dogs to entrap me. I could have made a

fortune—I said I was going to franchise it, and have bumperstickers ("Get a Little Tail For Your Dog"). The press kept growing and the story became international. I didn't want customers—it was never my intent to defraud or deceive people for money. Deceit—yes, fraud—no. To rip people off for money—no. To make them think—yes. Hoax has a negative connotation—it's like being a con-man, exploiting people for money. I don't do that.

An artist is much different from a con-man. I am a con-man, but I'm a con-fidence, con-ceptual, con-artist. That's different.

Anyway, ABC's documentary was nominated for an Emmy as the best news broadcast of the year, and I was subpoenaed by the Attorney General for illegally running a cathouse for dogs. I made my appearance at the Attorney General's office with an entourage of my actors and revealed that it was a conceptual performance. Of course they were shocked, outraged—not believing me. I had to make a statement with a court stenographer and an Assistant Attorney General. When it was revealed that it was not true—that it was a hoax—ABC never retracted their story.

Now this is one of the issues that is a by-product of my art, a very important issue: the ethics and responsibility of investigative journalists. When we are dependent upon the media for objective truth and we are not getting it, and when it's *intentionally* not told to us, that's disinformation, deceit, and it's blatantly irresponsible, and even worse than that.

We look to them for information. They set themselves up as providers of that information. When they don't give us that information, it's for a number of reasons. In the case of the Cathouse For Dogs, they did not want their credibility as an investigative news source questioned. They didn't have the integrity to tell their viewing audience that it didn't exist, because they didn't want to look bad. They also didn't want to give me any additional unnecessary attention. Basically the news condescends to its audience and is frequently contrived. As a result, if you were only an ABC news-watcher and you didn't see any other networks saying it was a hoax, you'd still to this day think there was a Cathouse For Dogs.

In *The Total Dog Book*, published in 1984, the Cathouse For Dogs is *still* listed. This again exemplifies how information—disinformation—is perpetuated.

On a broader scale, as an artist I document the phenomenon of communication. I try to videotape my performance. I write my concept down, I set it up, I document it, I get copies of the television news interpretation, I hire a press clipping service and I collect the newspaper and magazine editorial interpretations. I tape-record my radio interviews and my telephone conversations and collect the letters and responses I get from the mail.

The communication phenomenon is somewhat like an elaborate version of the "telephone game." If there were only three people at this table and I whispered something in your ear (having written down what I was going to say), and you whispered it in the next person's ear, and the next person said what it was, then we could kind of pinpoint what went wrong. I know what I said, and I know what he said, so he got it from you or he made it up. So either you or he intentionally perpetrated a lie.

In this day and age, with electronic telecommunications instantaneously darting around the globe and people feeding off everyone else's network of nerve endings, a misspelled word or a misplaced exclamation mark can totally change the content and intent of what is being said. And it's almost impossible to determine where the accidental change came from. And that's on a mild level. It's even *intentionally* done. Governments are doing it, corporations are doing it. Individuals within the media itself are doing it, and people like

myself are doing it to make sociopolitical commentaries.

I do what I do to make a commentary, and I always tell the truth because there is a purpose in doing it. What worries me is when I'm not able to tell the truth—when for its own reasons the media doesn't want the truth to be told. Realizing, with my limited funds and limited imagination what I'm capable of doing on an international level, just imagine what people who have other intents, with a lot *more* money, brains, time, and other motivations are doing, have done, and will continue to do! It becomes a very frightening reality when you think about it.

■ *AJ: What is reality?*

■ *JS: Right. What is reality, and how can you know what is history?*

I'd also like to talk about technology and where we're going. With the ability to computer-generate photo images and do montage, collage and eventually holograms, we'll have Hitler alive in South America totally fabricated we'll have a home movie of JFK actually screwing Marilyn Monroe, or whatever twisted historical thing we want to create. And it will be virtually impossible to detect that it's a creation, because of the advancements in technology. We are coming to the forefront technologically of a really frightening media reality. If we don't sharpen our tools now, our integrity, we're in for even bigger trouble.

My process has been an evolutionary process. I didn't start out in 1966 saying, "I think I'll show how irresponsible the media is." This evolved out of many things, but again it is not the only issue that I'm involved in in my work.

Let me go on to other performances. In the '70s, I created Giuseppe Scagolli's Celebrity Sperm Bank. I was the proprietor of a sperm bank which was having an auction of rock star sperm. I made up some ridiculous political party and made up phony endorsements, sent out press releases and ran advertisements. I got together 50 actors and staged this performance.

Let me first tell you how this came about. The year after "Cathouse," in 1976, I was going through the yellow pages and I came across Sperm Banks and said, "Hmmm" I called one up and said, "Hi, my name is Joey Skaggs. I'm a screenplay writer and I'm doing a script. I have a scene that takes place in a sperm bank, but really, I have no idea what one looks like or how it operates. I'd like to know if it's possible to take a look at your facility." The reaction was,

ABC's documentary was nominated for an Emmy as the best news broadcast of the year, and I was subpoenaed by the Attorney General for illegally running a cathouse for dogs. When it was revealed that it was not true—that it was a hoax—ABC never retracted their story.

"Who are you? We don't want cameras." I said, "Wait, wait." They said, "Do you have any references?" I said, "Sure," and they got back to me and I made an appointment for a week later.

I went up town to the sub-lobby of a very modern building a huge waiting room with circular seats with cut-outs like a bus depot so you didn't have to look at the other guy who was there to jerk off and donate or store his sperm. One wall was all glass, and on the other side of this were the techni-

cians and the scientific apparatus. On the other side of the waiting room were the masturbation rooms. A matronly woman, dressed all in white, came out and introduced herself to me. I introduced myself to her and she gave me some pamphlets to read pertaining to the history of sperm banking.

Sperm banking was invented by an Italian in the '50s. Its usage is mainly in the beef and dairy industry. You have a great bull, a great sire. What he eats he puts on in weight and he does it rather fast. He's resistant to certain diseases. So, Ferdinand is a great bull; you wish you had a whole herd of Ferdinands. Rather than ship Ferdinand around to mount and mate the cattle, or bring the cattle to Ferdinand, they devised artificial insemination.

The pamphlets went on to say when the first artificially inseminated child was conceived, and how many artificially inseminated children are born every year. I was amused and fascinated by this.

I was then given a tour of the facility. I was shown the first masturbation room: 8x10' room, black leather chair, nightstand, Kleenex tissues, wastepaper basket, and tearsheets from pornographic magazines. I didn't say anything—I was trying to hold back from laughing. I was shown the second masturbation room: same interior, slightly larger, two tranquil prints of landscapes, and a chrome coat hanger which I surmised was where you hung your pants.

Then I said (in my very straight voice), "Pardon me, but are you allowed to receive assistance?" She furrowed her brow and said, "No. In very rare instances we allow the wife, the mate, to enter the room, but we only accept manual ejaculation."

Donors were given a sterile Dixie cup which they were supposed to make their deposit in. I don't know how guys shoot into a Dixie cup—not having done it, it's still a mystery to me. Obviously they must do it somehow.

After they'd made their deposit, they'd walk out across the lobby up to the sliding window and ring the bell there. A technician then would take the sperm and place it on a digital scale which was so accurate that it would go from .001 to .002 just from the varying air currents if you waved your hand over it. I did not donate, but I was given the opportunity to see how it was all done.

For lack of technical terminology, a smidgen of the sperm was placed on a microscope slide. With the use of an electron microscope connected to a video monitor, I was shown 6-hour-old, 8-hour-old, 24-hour-old sperm, 2-headed sperm, 2-tailed sperm, dead guys, fast guys. We made jokes; we made bets who was going to get from this side of the screen to the other side first. It was quite amazing.

The procedure went on. They took another smidgen of sperm and placed it into a liquid solution and ran it through a digital sperm counter three times to get an accurate sperm count. The sperm was then placed into a straw—I don't know whose job that was or how they did it—and the straw was sealed, coded with an individual code number, and placed into a perforated metal test tube which had the code number on it, and then capped. The bank looked like an old wringer-type washing machine without the wringer apparatus on top—a tub with a lazy susan inside under liquid nitrogen frozen to 360 degrees below 0 Fahrenheit.

A technician stepped on a pedal and up from the liquid nitrogen with tubes, tanks, and alarms connected to it came the lazy susan with frozen sperm. With gloves and forceps he picked up different frozen sperm samples. Sperm is frozen for up to about ten years, and periodically they do tests on the sperm. With a tinge of paranoia, I was very concerned about that: What kind of testing? Just to test if it's still good? What kind of creatures are you making in here?

I was then told about the types of donors. As we all know, the anonymous donors are ugly medical students who never get laid. Then there's the donor who stores his own sperm. Both types of donors have to abstain from any kind of sex for a minimum of 3 days to ensure a higher sperm count.

I asked if she would explain what kinds of people are anonymous donors (besides ugly medical students). I asked her if possibly these people were doing this because they don't have to be legally, morally, financially responsible and aren't they getting some kind of kick from this? She said she preferred to think they were humanitarians.

The other type of donor would store his own sperm for a number of reasons. One, he's going to have a vasectomy. But, to safeguard against possibly changing his mind or his mate's mind, he would store his own sperm. The other reason could be that his work endangers his genitalia. He's working with radioactive material or explosives, and just to safeguard the family jewels he stores a little jism.

Another reason could be that he has contracted cancer of the prostate and is going to undergo chemotherapy which could possibly render him sterile, so rather than not be able to have children, he stores some sperm.

Another reason which was my own invention was: you store your sperm like vintage wine. Before you lose your hair, your teeth, get a pot-belly; before you do all those drugs and fuck up your chromosomes, while you've still got some good chromosomes left, you store it away.

I was fascinated by the sociopolitical implications (this is in 1976). Surrogate mothers, cloning, test-tube babies, gene-splicing, new life forms; all the legal, religious, political issues that come from technology which challenges, surpasses, threatens (however you want to look at it) morality.

I realized there was potential tremendous controversy, and that it would make a great documentary. Like, what is the Catholic response? What do Hindus believe (if you were born this way you'd be interfering with natural karma; you'd be born without a soul). What would paranoiacs say (that in the advent of World War III only certain Americans would be reproduced: thinkers or workers or sex objects or whatever). There were all kinds of implications here. Rather than attempt to do a book: to write a treatment, get a literary agent, get a publisher to sign a contract and take a year or two writing before it's out. Or attempt to do a documentary film—go to ABC, CBS, or NBC which are all in-house union production companies. Or try to raise the money independently and do a documentary which hardly ever makes money, and possibly have all this work sitting in a can on a shelf collecting dust. None of that did I want to do.

So I used the vulnerability, the gullibility of the media to gain access and make a commentary. Lots of journalists don't like it when I do that, because I'm pulling their pompous pants down and exposing them. But I am gaining access and saying something which I think is valid, which through other channels could take a long time, a lot of effort, and might not get done.

So I created Guiseppe Scagolli's Celebrity Sperm Bank with 50 actors and had them play various types of people: from groupies to lesbian militant feminists who supported this because they could have a child without having sex with a man. And I staged this elaborate performance which made national news.

■ AJ: You videotaped this?

■ JS: Yes. And to prevent journalists from coming up to see that there was no sperm bank facility, it was all closed off. Police did arrive because there was a crowd in the street. I made an announcement to the crowd, to the reporters, and to the actors.

Now I utilize actors as well as the general public who

don't know that they're involved in a performance. So when I have a crowd in the street with 50 actors it attracts a larger crowd, and when the police come there's even more of a crowd. I said, "The sperm bank was broken into, and the sperm was stolen. Bob Dylan will be donating again next Wednesday, and Mick said he'd do it in a few minutes, but "

This was when Abbie Hoffman was in hiding and I said, "There exists suspicion that Abbie Hoffman has stolen the sperm. Abbie, as you know, has had a vasectomy, and we're wondering what Abbie would be wanting with the sperm. We don't know if this is a federal kidnapping case yet—we haven't determined when life begins."

It was totally ludicrous, but it even made publications like *Record World* and other rock 'n' roll industry publications. Gloria Steinem on NBC national television awarded my sperm bank the Earl Butz Award for bad taste. She actually

In one prank I was Jo-Jo, the King of the New York Gypsies. I led a gypsy protest in front of the governor's office, shouting, "Re-name the gypsy moth!" I had this ridiculous gypsy moth illustrated on my back and this ridiculous sign which said, "GYPSIES AGAINST STEREOTYPICAL PROPAGANDA."

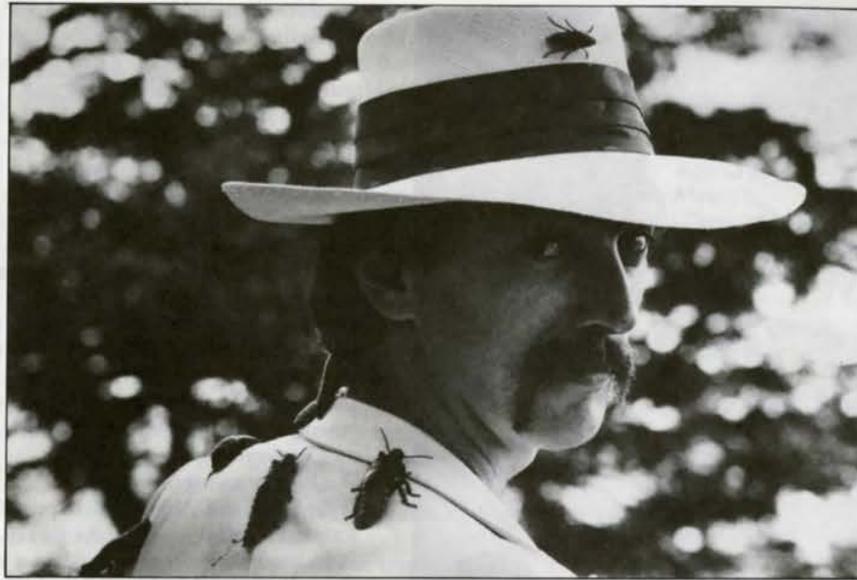
printed the story in *Ms.* magazine; she totally believed it. I called Gloria Steinem afterwards and told her it was a hoax and she was quite surprised, saying, "Oh! Well, next time you're doing another thing, let me know!" Sure, Gloria—very happy to tell you! So that was the celebrity sperm bank.

I did one piece as Dr Joseph Gregor, leading world entomologist with a PhD from the University of Columbia in Bogota. I said I had been working with cockroaches for years. I was fearful that we were destroying the air, the water and the soil, perpetrating a holocaust—possibly nuclear war or vast irreversible pollution. In order to survive, I believed the cockroach, which has been around for about 350 million years, had the answer. I had proved myself right—it did, I had found it, and I was now making my discovery available.

I said that I had developed a superstrain of cockroaches. I had been feeding toxins to them for three years, and my roaches had developed immunities to the toxins. When they did, I extracted their hormones and made a cockroach vitamin pill which cured arthritis, acne, anemia, menstrual cramps, and makes one invulnerable to nuclear radiation. I and my followers, my devotees (about 70) had been imbibing cockroach vitamin pills for over a year, and our colds and influenzas had all disappeared.

In order to perpetrate this, I took an apartment uptown and turned it into my laboratory/office/gallery. I boasted the world's largest collection of cockroach art: paintings, drawings, sculpture, collage, montage, a terrarium much like my fish condo containing a New York street scene with roaches running rampant microscopes, test tubes, beakers, and 70 devotee followers. I placed ads in the now-defunct *Soho News* which read, "BE PREPARED. Mankind is destroying the planet. Metamorphosis is the answer. Roaches: a race above. For information call 254-7878." I got wacky calls, which I recorded.

"I said I had developed a superstrain of cockroaches. I extracted their hormones and made a cockroach vitamin pill which cured arthritis, acne, anemia, menstrual cramps, and makes one invulnerable to nuclear radiation. UPI bought the story hook, line and sinker: *Roach Hormone Held as Miracle Drug.*"



I sent out my press release and had my 70 actors there with a cockroach birthday cake. I had hostesses serving cockroach vitamin pills with cups of water; we had a toast and imbibed. Of the numerous journalists present, there was a representative of United Press International; UPI bought the story hook, line and sinker. The headline which ran around the country was: "Roach Hormone Held as Miracle Drug."

■ AJ: *So this was picked up by wire services all over the country?*

■ JS: Yes—all over the world.

■ AJ: *They don't do much research, do they?! [looks at numerous news clippings] So all you did was send out a press release?*

■ JS: And advertisements, plus I staged a very elaborate performance in a fake office, laboratory and gallery.

■ AJ: *What were the 70 actors doing?*

■ JS: They were my devotees, imbibing the roach pills. I gave a speech and they all applauded me, and they gave testimonials to the journalists as to what diseases they had and how they overcame their diseases by taking the roach vitamin pills.

I also received a phone call from the producer of WNBC news "Live at Five," and was asked to appear that night on the news. So I went on television as Dr Joseph Gregor, leading world entomologist, and gave my spiel.

When it was revealed that it was a hoax, UPI did not immediately retract the story. It took them months, and they did it in an obscure story on hoaxes buried in the back of the paper. They were furious with me (which they have been a number of times) and quite embarrassed.

You would think that out of all these publications and all these journalists—with all the editors reading—that someone would get the obvious clues: my organization's name was *Metamorphosis*, my name was Dr Joseph Gregor, and I used cockroaches. You know Franz Kafka, the famous Czech author, wrote *The Metamorphosis* about Gregor Samsor who turned into a 6-foot insect. That's so obvious, but no one got it—no one. And the clues were so obvious. Like in *The Fat Squad*—my name was Joe Bones!

■ AJ: *You had another media blitz on how you were a hoaxster—that was in People.*

■ JS: Yes, that's when the expose came out also the front page of *The Wall Street Journal*. I did Phil Donahue, etc.

■ AJ: *Talking about this cockroach hoax?*

■ JS: Yes, as Joey Skaggs telling *why*—which brings me to an important point. Just doing a hoax is not the total performance. It's not the end of the piece; it's not the finale or the objective. What's more important, and more difficult to do, is to get the media to come back to allow me to say why and what it means. I'll admit that I've hoaxed someone, what the purpose is, what it means and how it happened. It's more difficult to get the media to cover that than to get them to initially fall for it.

■ AJ: *Because then they have to admit that they fell for it. So how do you get them to follow up?*

■ JS: Well, there's such a rivalry between various media sources. If ABC falls for something, NBC loves that they fell for it and NBC didn't. The fact of the matter is, *they* probably would have too, if that news story hadn't been preempted by another news story. It's always like that. Rather than have to go through setting up the same production (and each performance has its own difficulties and inherent problems), I usually only attempt to do it once. In some instances I've done them repeatedly, but it's a real pain to have to stage something over and over again for every different media source.

There's such a rivalry between various media sources. If ABC falls for something, NBC loves that they fell for it and NBC didn't.

Usually once is enough. The *Post* loves to put down the *Times* because the *Times* condescends to the *Post*. It's very easy to get the rivals to point a finger at the other guy. It's much harder to get the people who have been burned to say they've been burned

In one prank I was "Jo-Jo, the King of the New York Gypsies." I called for a re-naming of the gypsy moth. I led a gypsy protest in front of the governor's office, shouting, "Re-name the gypsy moth!" I had this ridiculous gypsy moth illustrated on my back and this ridiculous sign which



"I called for the re-naming of the gypsy moth and led a protest in front of the governor's office. You wonder who is going to fall for this. Answer: *The New York Times!*"

said, "RENAME THE GYPSY MOTH!" on one side and on the other, "GYPSIES AGAINST STEREOTYPICAL PROPAGANDA (G.A.S.P)." I said, "Call it the Ayatollah moth, call it the Idi Amin moth, call it the Hitler moth—we gypsies have taken enough abuse."

You would wonder *who* is going to fall for this? This is so ridiculous, so stupid—*rename the gypsy moth?* Answer: *The New York Times!*

■ AJ: *Ohmigod. [reading from paper] "Cloudy Crystal Ball for Gypsy Rights Group."*

■ JS: The author of this piece, Clyde Haberman, hates my guts. Page six of the *Post* (which loves screwing the *Times*) says, "*Times Falls for the Old Switcheroo.*"

■ AJ: *Your name is obviously now well-known.*

■ JS: Right, but it doesn't matter! What do you know about gypsies? You don't even know their last names! You can't trust gypsies, anyhow. So you go into the whole preconceived notion that the press has created—they created disinformation and a condescending attitude about who gypsies are, anyhow. They're all fortune-tellers, they're all crooks, they're this, they're that. Using that, I did the gypsy protest march and they bought it—the *New York Times*. You can imagine how angry he was.

■ AJ: *What year was the gypsy moth?*

■ JS: 1982. In 1979 I was Sir Joseph Bucks, a multimillionaire who made my fortune from my modest beginnings shining shoes on Wall Street. I shined the shoes of stockbrokers and listened to their conversations, heard some flippant tips and became very astute at investing and became

a multimillionaire. I went back to Wall Street in a chauffeur-driven limousine, a tuxedo with white gloves, hostesses serving grapes, and classical music playing, gold leaf stuff, very posh chairs and potted palms and I shined shoes for five dollars a shine on Wall Street. I had skills in the audience as well as real people. My chauffeur served cocktails. And this made the news—they believed it.

I have to remind you that I not only do hoaxes, I use the media in whatever way I think is appropriate for the comment I want to make. Some pieces are juxtapositions of reality; some are ironic reversals. Some are direct provocative political-social comments done by creating a performance that makes a statement that is not a lie. Some are elaborately-constructed hoaxes. And there are a number of ways of gaining access. I'm not limited to one, because I don't want only to make a joke out of everything; some things are far too serious. In 1981 I did a World Hunger Performance on Thanksgiving Day.

■ AJ: *How was this received?*

■ JS: I had the Abyssinian Baptist Choir sing a capella. I sculpted a coffin cooked a turkey dinner and had a real articulated skeleton of a child as a centerpiece. I blew up giant photographs of starving children which I placed on easels. It was a very horrific visual; it was not a sweet Thanksgiving Day: *how many shopping days left 'til Christmas?* It was a horrific visual, and it did get some media attention, though not much, because it was a stark contrast to the Macy's Day Parade. The Macy's Day Parade is pure commercialism, and that's what the press wants to feed us. That's what the media *is* in many instances.

Another performance piece I did for nuclear disarmament had a pile of dead bodies and bombs. The performers were Reagan and Brezhnev in mock battle—playful, like it was inconsequential they were having a pillow fight with nuclear bombs. It didn't matter that actors fell to the ground and there were "dead" mannequins all around. It was another direct political statement. It was not a hoax, it was a serious performance.

■ AJ: *This was out in the street?*

■ JS: In front of the U.N.

In 1971 at the New York Avant-garde Festival I did a piece with John and Yoko. This is where I was an anonymous

**Part of what I do is unknown waters.
The electronic media has only been
around for forty-odd years and is
relatively new, not like cave paintings.
Just because it's controlled by a small
number of people doesn't mean that we
can't or shouldn't have the ability to
get to it. I use its vulnerabilities
to make my own comments.**

celebrity. John and Yoko came in dirty dungarees and a Datsun; I came in a chauffeur-driven limousine and a suit. I had actors screaming, applauding, trying to interview me, photographing me. The crowd of people who were waiting to get into the festival recognized John and Yoko, but they didn't know me. They're saying, "That's John and Yoko, but who the hell is *that?*" So I was famous for fifteen minutes—I think I did it before Warhol said it.



"In 1981 I did a World Hunger Performance on Thanksgiving Day. I cooked a turkey dinner and had a real articulated skeleton of a child as a centerpiece."

■ **AJ:** [looking at photo] What was this Hell's Angels wedding with kids on bicycles?

■ **JS:** This was a satire on the Hell's Angels. I staged a mock Hell's Angel Wedding with a procession using kids on bicycles. I built an outrageous tricycle with horns and bells, lights and flags and an enormous radio and we dragged pointy shoes and sneakers and beer cans behind. The kids, my bride and I peddled up to where the Hell's Angels were parked, and distributed a case of San Juan Coco Molta non-alcoholic beverage.

Then there was the sewer monster—you know how every geographical area has a legendary monster: Loch Ness, Big Foot, and all that. You think of New York people flushing stuff down the toilet: chemicals, alligators, etc, so I created New York's legendary sewer monster. As a diversionary tactic I had a mock demonstration in front of the governor's office against the Concorde's entering New York, then I had a monster pop up out of a manhole cover and attack the protestors. It was a silly thing.

This is an opera house I used to own [shows photo]. I bought it and donated it, started a cultural arts center and it's now a federal landmark.

■ **AJ:** What else have you done?

■ **JS:** I've exhibited my paintings taught Media Communications at the School of Visual Arts in New York lectured about the media and my work at colleges and universities around the country. I've won a number of grants and awards. In general, I've spent my life exploring and experimenting with various media. I wrote a musical where the entire theater was inside a giant Cadillac, the stage was a giant dashboard, there was a live band in the radio, the actors were on the dashboard, the windshield was a film and the rear view mirror was a film. One of these days it might be produced.

I started a floating art colony consisting of a fleet of houseboats on the Hudson River in the '60s. It was eventually burned out by the Mafia. I did an Olympic sports satire

made an obscene motorcycle out of a fiberglass mannikin with an upholstered penis as a seat; I rode between her thighs. I taught at a prison for a year-and-a-half and organized inmates' art shows. I've just done what every artist does—I've tried to question and be creative in every way possible.

Another big hoax: I was the first person to cross the Pacific Ocean from Hawaii to California on a wind surfing board. It said, "Cal or Bust!" I got together approximately 200 Hawaiians and had a huge aloha party at Hanalei Bay on the island of Kauai. Three video crews were present. I said I

was setting out to reach California in approximately 40 days with hardly any provisions and they believed it. I had a stand-in double—I can't even swim! This was international news: "Man Wind Surfs from Kauai to California—Here He Comes on a Sailboard!" (UPI) "California, Here I Don't Come!—Windsurfer Reveals Hoax."

The Bad Guys Talent Management Agency was a hoax which became a reality. I have known Verne Williams for about twenty years. He was actually on my bus tour for Queens in 1968. Verne had moved to Virginia and was a professional farrier, a horseshoer and a cow hoof trimmer—he mostly worked with cows. For years Verne would write me long letters about how he wanted to come to New York and be an actor. I would fire back quick notes: "Forget it, it's the highest unemployed profession there is." He continued to write me long letters about the meaning of life and wanting to pursue his dream. I thought to myself, "Who am I to make a value judgment about what he wants to do?" and wrote him a note saying, "Listen, if you want to be an actor, don't write me letters about it—come to New York and do it."

Verne came to New York and we went out for coffee. Verne shaves his head; he looks like the kind of guy you'd fire from a cannon. He has a moustache; he's short with a really huge barrel chest. He was a professional boxer; he was actually a U.S. Army champion in 1956. He'll be 51 in August—he doesn't look it. He's still very strong, like a bulldog. That's his nickname, "Bulldog."

Verne said in his very deep voice, "Hey, Joey, you've got to help me get some commercials so I can have some residuals to hold me over until I can get some feature movie work." I said, "Verne, 25,000 actors every day eat a mile of shit just to kiss the asshole of an agent in this town. *Everybody* wants commercials with residuals! You kidding? Do you have a portfolio?" "No portfolio." "Do you have a headshot or a resume?" "No; I don't have any money." I said, "Verne, this is reality here. You have to have something to leave behind, something to mail out, you have to pound the streets. It's not easy." "That's why I want *you* to help me. If anybody can help me, *you* can." I said, "I'm flattered, Verne, but this is ridiculous." He said, "Well, you *gotta* help me."

I said, "Well, I'll tell you what. You need an agent. No one's going to be your agent if you don't have an S.A.G. card. You're not a member of AFTRA, you have no experience, you didn't study dance or voice or movement. You haven't been in Summerstock, you haven't done *anything*. I tell you

"Another big hoax: I was the first person to cross the Pacific Ocean from Hawaii to California on a wind surfing board. I said I was setting out to reach California in approximately 40 days with hardly any provisions and they believed it."



"The Bad Guys Talent Agency was a hoax which became a reality. Bad guys, bad girls, bad kids, and bad dogs—specializing in burly bouncers, slimy sleazes and venomous vixens. ABC, NBC, CBS all called me up and wanted to do a story. So I got together a group of friends, and with motorcycles, leather jackets, chains, and whips we posed. Hundreds of lunatics called me and they all wanted to be bad guys."



what: *I'll be your agent.*" "Oh, okay." "But I'll tell you what I'm going to do—I'm going to specialize. I'm going to call it 'Bad Guys, Inc.' You look like a thug, so I'm going to play it up. Go to the Post Office and get me a WANTED poster. I'll make up a WANTED poster on you." "Oh, great!"

I go home. Ten minutes later Verne calls up. "Hey Skaggs, I'm at the Post Office but the fuckin' postmaster won't give me the WANTED poster. He says it's illegal to hand them out." I say, "Steal it, asshole!" and hang up on him. He comes in fifteen minutes later pissed off and throws down a WANTED poster. I set him up against the wall; I shoot a roll of film. A few days later I produce a mechanical; we mail it out. Three days after that I get a phone call from a major casting agent.

■AJ: *So you set yourself up as an agency specializing in Bad Guys?*

■JS: Bad guys, bad girls, bad kids, and bad dogs: Bad Guys, Inc, specializing in burly bouncers, slimy sleazes and venomous vixens.

So this casting agent calls. I don't know who he is and I don't know anything about this business. I actually have contempt for a business in which artists need permission to practice their art. But I also have empathy for artists whose work is interpretive and collaborative. The business of acting, like many businesses, is the antithesis of the creative process. And it holds all the powers.

Again, it goes back to finding your own power, taking charge and doing it. Why go to somebody and ask them if you can have a chance to practice your art—to do your art? It's hard for me to deal with that kind of mentality. The people who set themselves up to give you permission infuriate me: the agents, the managers, and the bullshit.

So, when this agent called me, I didn't know who he was. He woke me up. Nobody calls me that early in the morning; certainly not my friends. I said, "Who is this?" "Fabulous—I call the Bad Guys Agency and I get a bad guy!" He tells me he has my Mr Williams poster in front of him and he thinks he's fabulous for a feature movie he's casting, and would it be possible for Mr Williams to be in his office Monday at eleven o'clock? I said, "Sure, what's your name? What's your phone

number? What's your address?" He just keeps saying, "Fabulous."

I tell Verne and he's all excited. I put on a black suit and with my big black mustache I look as *bad* as Verne. I warn Verne that there are probably other actors up for this part, and I want to do a little theatrical performance to make sure we make an impression.

We barge into the office. The receptionist recognizes Verne from the headshot and calls the agent on the intercom. He comes out and shakes Verne's hand, "Pleased to meet you. I thought you'd scare us all to death."

Verne introduces me, "I want you to meet my manager, Joey Skaggs." "Oh, hi, Joey," like he's known me all his life, because I have an agency and I'm representing someone he's interested in. We go into his office and he gets the script which is Berry Gordy's *The Last Dragon*; it came out a couple years ago and had a Number One song in the Top Forty. It's a tongue-in-cheek kung-fu movie which did pretty well.

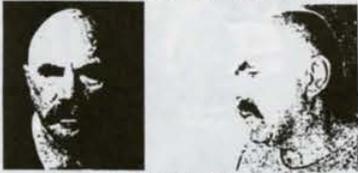
The agent is looking for Verne to read a running monologue. I say to the agent, "Verne doesn't have to read this script," and I give him a really stern look. The guy looks at me incredulously like I'm out of my mind: "What?" He looks at Verne and I look at Verne and Verne looks at me like he's thinking *Skaggs, what are you doing?* and I smack Verne in the mouth.

Now I'd told Verne that I was going to do it. Verne didn't know if I *really* was going to do it or not, and looked surprised—but not as surprised as the agent. When I smacked him in the mouth, Verne (like he was hypnotized) jumped into character. He leaped in the agent's face. Now Verne has a pet pit-bull dog named Bowser, and Verne does a great dog. He did dog all in this guy's face: "Rrrrrrr!" and the guy jumped up and back 6 feet, landed on the ground, clutched his heart like a bad B movie, composed himself and said, "Fabulous, fabulous"—he loved it.

He sent Verne out to meet the director. We stagger out into the elevator down the street, doubled over in laughter. He can't believe I did it, and I can't believe how great a dog he did

Two hours later I get a phone call: Verne has got the part,

WANTED BY THE FBI
BAD GUYS INC.



IMPOSTOR/MASTER OF DISGUISES
VERNE WILLIAMS
Aliases: TURTLE, BULL DOG, GRUNT, MAD MAN WILLIAMS, STUMPY, BUZZ

DESCRIPTION

Date of Birth: AUGUST 2, 1935	Eyes: BROWN
Place of Birth: HOLYOKE, MASSACHUSETTS	Complexion: LIGHT
Height: 5' 6"	Race: CAUCASIAN
Weight: 180 POUNDS	Nationality: AMERICAN
Hair: BROWN	Remarks: SHAVES HEAD, WEARS GENTILES, PREPARES CATTLE FOR DRYING TRANSPARENTS, REPUTEDLY LIVES TO WORK OUT IN A GYMNASIUM.
Occupations: FARTNER, PROFESSIONAL BOXER, ACTOR	Social Security Number Used: 012-08-6418
Scars and Marks: "SUN" TATOO ON RIGHT HAND	Fingerprint Classification: 8 5 1 US 3 Ref: 0
MCC: 0805T020307AAA	

CAUTION
WILLIAMS, ALIAS "BULL DOG", IS CONSIDERED TO BE AN EXTREMELY GIFTED IMPOSTOR. HE HAS REPORTEDLY POSED AS BRITISH, IRISH, WELSH, JEWISH, GERMAN, FRENCH CANADIAN, SOUTHERN, OLD, A THUG, A HEMOSEXUAL AND A BIKER.

IF YOU WANT INFORMATION CONCERNING BAD GUYS, BAD GIRLS, BAD KIDS, BAD DOGS, CONTACT YOUR LOCAL BAD GUYS OFFICE. TELEPHONE NUMBER AND ADDRESS IS AS FOLLOWS:
BAD GUYS INC. 187 WATERLY PLACE BY WY 18011 (212) 288-6371 JOEY SCAGGS

WANTED BY THE FBI
BAD GIRLS INC.



IMPOSTOR/MASTER OF DISGUISES
ARAS JONES
Aliases: BETON, THE TONGUE, MS. HOOPER, NATA HART, HOTTS, MS. QUELL

DESCRIPTION

Date of Birth: MAY 16, 1952	Eyes: BLUE
Place of Birth: BROOKLYN, NEW YORK	Complexion: LIGHT
Height: 5' 3"	Race: CAUCASIAN
Weight: 115 POUNDS	Nationality: AMERICAN
Name: BUILT	Remarks: SWEET TALKER, KNOWN TO TALK A MAN INTO CLIMAXING WITHIN THREE MINUTES. YOUNG BOYS BEWARE.
Sex: FEMALE	Social Security Number Used: 085-42-3691
Occupations: TELEPHONE SEX OPERATOR, ACTRESS	Fingerprint Classification: 8 N 1 US 3 Ref: 0
Scars and Marks: SPACES BETWEEN TEETH	
MCC: 0805T020307AAA	

CAUTION
A REAL CHARMER, A HOUSE WRECKER, A HEART BREAKER. THIS WOMAN HAS ABSOLUTELY NO SCRUPLES. SHE WILL TELL YOUR WIFE. SHE MARRIES RICH TO GET PAID OFF. CAUTION: RECOMMEND THAT ALL AGENTS WHO COME IN INTIMATE CONTACT WITH HER SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL ATTENTION.

IF YOU WANT INFORMATION CONCERNING BAD GUYS, BAD GIRLS, BAD KIDS, BAD DOGS, CONTACT YOUR LOCAL BAD GUYS OFFICE. TELEPHONE NUMBER AND ADDRESS IS AS FOLLOWS:
BAD GUYS INC. 187 WATERLY PLACE BY WY 18011 (212) 288-6371 JOEY SCAGGS

a principal role in Berry Gordy's *The Last Dragon*, and an S.A.G. card waiver which enables him to get an S.A.G. card. He made thousands of dollars

That was only the beginning. A week after the incident with the casting agent, I'm taking my consciousness-gathering wake-up shower—it's eleven o'clock in the morning, a reasonable time to get up. The phone rings, I reach out of the shower, grab it, and it's Becky Bricker, a writer from *People* magazine (Becky has become a friend and fan of mine. She covered Dr Joseph Gregor for the feature article in *People* and went to the world hunger performance, etc). Becky wanted to know if I was responsible for the story that was circulating that the C.I.A. had absolute proof that the Soviet Union was using chemical warfare in Cambodia because they had found acid rain stains on the foliage, but upon examination it turned out to be the feces of bees? Did I do that? I said, "Becky, thanks for thinking of me, but it wasn't me. I have a funny story to tell you, though. You want to hear a funny story?" She says, "Sure."

I shut off the water and proceeded to tell her the story I've just told you about Verne. She says, "Fantastic story! I want to write this for *People*. Send me all the material." I said, "Great—bye-bye." We hang up the phone, and I say to myself, "Send her *what* material? All I have is one flyer of Verne Williams." So I spend the next two weeks creating a folio of bad guys. I have to create a package because there isn't *truth* in numbers, there's *strength* in numbers.

Strength in numbers equates to truth in numbers. When I had a vigilante organization called *Walk Right!*, if it was only me patrolling the streets no one would have believed me, but a squadron of people they believe.

Here are the bad guys clippings: *People*, *New York Magazine*, *The Star* This is Verne Williams.

■ AJ: He's now an actor?

■ JS: Yes. He's been Mr Clean for Proctor and Gamble, he was a guest on *As the World Turns*, was in a recent Woody Allen movie, has done commercials, and has been a guest on national and local talk shows.

On all the Bad Guys Wanted Posters I wrote ridiculous, outrageous remarks like: "Sweet talker, known to talk a man

into climaxing within three minutes—young boys beware! Caution—a real charmer, a housewrecker, a heartbreaker, this woman has absolutely no scruples; she *will* tell your wife. She marries rich to get paid off. *Caution*: we recommend that all agents who come in contact with this woman seek immediate medical attention." I called her Ms. Quell.

I created ridiculous posters like this. The agents, who are so used to milquetoast, Wonder Bread, the All-American look (they get hundreds of them everyday and throw them into the wastebasket) saw these things, enjoyed them, got a laugh, held onto them and called me.

When you appear in *People* magazine, it starts a whole other phenomenon. ABC, NBC, CBS all called me up and wanted to do a story on the Bad Guys Talent Agency. But there is no Bad Guys Talent Agency. So I got together a group of friends, and with motorcycles, leather jackets, chains, and whips we posed around here, inside and outside on the street. The news people came and then broadcasted: "If you're a mean-looking actor or model, here's the talent agency for *you!* Call Joey Scaggs at Bad Guys, Inc," and they gave out my telephone number on the air.

What happened? Hundreds of lunatics called me and they all wanted to be bad guys. I just got a part for a guy in an upcoming feature movie called *The Summoning*. He was recommended to me. He also shaves his head, has tattoos all over his body, and is six foot plus, etc. (But he just shot someone with a .38 and is now in jail.)

I got creeps lined up around the block, *real* bad guys—*real* bad girls wanting to be actors, 'cause they saw it on TV. It's everyone's dream; the media is everyone's dream: to see yourself on TV.

Every time the media called I would get together another troupe of friends and pretend we were the Bad Guys Talent Agency. I made *Entertainment Tonight*; *P.M. Magazine* did a feature on me. And it went on and on like that. As a result, casting agents now call me. I do print ads, commercials, and feature movies.

I have drawers of headshots of creeps. I get them in the mail. I now have a talent agency which I never wanted (and didn't give a damn about) that's a reality. But it's fun because

I'm able to get friends of mine and people jobs, just on guts and a hoax.

■AJ: *That is truly inspirational. What you're doing is slicing away all the residue we have in our minds that distances us from our dreams.*

■JS: Yes: "I can't do it. How do I do it? I don't know how." I used to think that P.R. meant Puerto Rican; I had no idea what P.R. meant. I learned how to do it. I'm writing a book about what I do and what it means and also a how-to. How to find that power, how to make a statement, 'cause apathy is a sick disease. Why be apathetic? You can make a difference. You can make a statement; you can be an individual and be heard, and people will listen to you.

Then I did fish condos as a joke.

■AJ: *What was fish condos in the context of media?*

■JS: It wasn't in the context of the media as much as it was another *medium* for me to express a commentary. I told you I'm a painter and a sculptor, so I invented condominiums for upwardly mobile guppies. They're little satires, only the satire usually goes over most people's heads. They look at it and say, "Oh, isn't this cute?" and don't see the satirical element there. It has a broad appeal because it's live art and it's miniatures and all that, but really there was a joke in it.

Even if I had only done one, the quantum leap of changing the whole concept of what an aquarium was to what it now can be, totally changed aquariums. They are now no longer rocks and divers and sunken treasures and ships and plastic or live plants. Now they can be anything. However, the interesting media aspect is: if I had only done one aquarium no one would come. *Life* magazine certainly wouldn't have come; I wouldn't have gone on Merv Griffin or Diane Sawyer, the CBS national news or *P.M. Magazine* again. *One* changed the concept, but *one* wasn't enough to warrant media attention.

I had to become the artist who makes fish condominiums in his studio, and I had to do a number of them to get the media coverage. So fish condominiums took off and went around the world in Italian, French, German, Dutch publications [shows them]. I just posed for *National Geographic* for a children's book on illusions which will come out in April '87. We had a little female model who posed peering through the door of the Van Gogh tank

■AJ: *Something that I've noticed is that your title changes with each piece. In this last one you're a conceptual artist.*

■JS: Yes. From beatnik, hippie, yuppie, radical/revolutionary, famous American criminal, conceptual artist, performance artist, happenings artist—they don't know how to pigeonhole me.

My vigilante organization was called "Walk Right!" It was an ad hoc committee of concerned citizens in black commando outfits, who were determined to improve sidewalk etiquette. There were 66 rules: No short people with umbrellas unless they could hold the umbrella a minimum height of 5'10" No wearing of sunglasses at night. No risque clothing on obese people. All joggers must wear underwear. Passing lanes, window-shopping lanes, slow lanes; no gesticulating, no pointing, no changing direction. We patrolled streets in New York collecting signatures from pedestrians who agreed with this idea. This was national news, but it was totally a hoax. I used my own name: President Joey Skaggs of Walk Right!

■AJ: [reading] "*... to clean up the walking habits of New York. Pedestrians demand proper behavior in New York City sidewalks, outraged by the rude and offensive sidewalk behavior we encounter on a daily basis. ... What year was Walk Right?*"

■JS: A couple of years ago. Read this one; I want to do this



"My vigilante organization was called 'Walk Right!' It was an ad hoc committee of concerned citizens who were determined to improve sidewalk etiquette."

one every year until it becomes a parade.

■AJ: [reading] "*April 1st Parade to honor Fool of the Year ... to remedy a glaring omission in the long list of New York's annual ethnic and holiday parades. ... All these events fail to recognize the importance of the day designated to commemorate the perennial folly of mankind ... nominees Ed Koch, Reagan, Khadafy, Marcos.*"

■JS: Some are truly funny people; some are ludicrous people—whatever the mood of the year is.

■AJ: *You're using the language of those who take media seriously.*

■JS: Right. The key is creative press writing. The press release is the concept, and it has to have a good hook. What they all want is to *visualize* something. It has to have a visual to it, and it's best if you provide one.

At this point I want to say that I am grateful to all my friends who have lent their time, talent and energies to participate in my productions—my art. Without them I couldn't have done it. They're extraordinarily talented artists, because it takes a lot to fool case-hardened pros in New York. Even with something as ludicrous as this, you have to really have it together.

The difference between being an artist doing a painting (being in total control, and stopping, finishing, when you sense that it has a life of its own), and doing a performance like this, is that there is *no control*. I can come up with a concept and execute it, but that's where you have to give up the control. Artists don't like to give up control. But it's absolutely necessary for this work to live.

I document who it inspires, where it goes, and how it gets twisted. It's like surfing: can I catch this wave? Can I stand up on the board? How far am I going to go? Am I going to get sucked under or am I going to make it to the beach? Can I cut back into the wave a number of times and do some nuances? When do I reveal it? It's much like surfing—you *never know*. The excitement comes from not knowing.

Part of what I do is unknown waters. The electronic media

has only been around for forty-odd years and is relatively new, not like cave paintings. Just because it's controlled by a small number of people doesn't mean that we can't or shouldn't have the ability to get to it. I use its vulnerabilities to make my own comments. I'm not loved by everyone, certainly, but that's the way it goes.

■ AJ: *It seems like you can do anything.*

■ JS: You certainly can. But I don't rip people off for money or endanger them. On the surface some ideas may sound funny, but when you analyze them they're not. Or the responsibility might be too much.

For example, often artists imitate what's showing in galleries so *they* might have a chance to show in galleries. There was a time when everyone was doing masking tape and filling in straight lines, but that was never what *my* personal statement was about. At any time serious artists might be overlooked, because they're not in vogue. In fact, art can be compared to a fashion show whose "movements" are dictated by galleries.

So in the '60s I wanted to make a statement about that. At the time there was "Op" and "Pop" and "Funk" and "Junk." I decided to name *my* art movement the "The Bowel Movement," calling my first performance piece "Obstruction" Art.

I thought of building a giant tunafish, putting it on the back of a truck, driving to the Lincoln Tunnel during rush hour and having six guys throw it out. I'd have my film crew there. Then after traffic was blocked for miles, the police wrecker would have to drive in and haul it out. It would be great, and I'd make my comment about the Bowel Movement—Obstruction Art.

You imagine this and it's a funny visual—you know it's going to get national news. Probably I'd be arrested, then I could make my statement. But if you think about someone possibly having a heart attack trapped in a car, or maybe a physician missing an appointment that's a life/death situation—I realized that I wouldn't jeopardize someone else's safety. The things I did made me jeopardize *my own* safety, but Some pranks are just pure expressions of hostility and contempt; they're misdirected, or are just for personal gain—but what's the point?

What's important is: *What are you saying?* What's the intent; what's the content; and what's the technique of what you're doing? Does it have magic, does it live, and does it have any socially redeeming value? If you can't tell me what that is, why are you doing it?

When you're talking about "pranks," I think it's important to define prank, hoax, scam, because they have many negative connotations. And I would like to address and avoid that

It's like: every fantasy you ever wanted to do, every person you ever wanted to be, a great athlete—you can be it! You can be whoever you want to be, if only in your mind, but it becomes reality in the mind of everyone else, too! So, having created history, how can you believe in history?

association, because it's not what I'm about. To come up with some obscure justification doesn't make it for me.

I don't ever tell the police a lie, because then it would be

fraud, and it would mean filing a falsified police report which is illegal. I believe in the First Amendment, and what I do hopefully supports the First Amendment.

To have this freedom of expression as an artist under the First Amendment is wonderful; I wouldn't want to lose it. But there is a whole issue about the government's involvement with controlling the media. When the government attacks the media, I want the media to be more responsible, and not let the government take it over.

But the government is more likely to want to control the media (like Agnew, Nixon and Watergate) if the media is blatantly irresponsible, like the General Westmoreland/CBS incident. So we have all these political issues that threaten freedom of speech threaten the First Amendment. And I'm a staunch supporter of the First Amendment, even though it looks like I'm making fun of it.

For the Fat Squad hoax my name was Joe Bones. I started the hoax by sending out a press release and a copy of a contract to the media, saying that for \$300 a day, for a minimum of three days, every eight hours a commando would make you adhere to your diet (somebody nicknamed it the Rambo diet).

Now there are many people out there exploiting people, making tons of money from the preoccupation with obesity. Whether it's the Cambridge Diet, the Pritikin Diet, the rice diet, high colonics with grapefruit—whatever it is, it doesn't really matter. What matters is common sense—if you eat too much and don't exercise, you're going to gain weight. It's common sense, but common sense eludes most people.

So I created the Fat Squad and mailed press releases, and got a phone call from the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Washington Post*. A young journalist was very interested in the story, and I gave him an interview. He called back because his editor wanted verification; he wanted to talk to some of these clients of mine. I said, "This is a confidential client list. I'd have to ask them—I just wouldn't want to tell you who they are, what their problems are and how much weight they lost without their permission. They pay a lot of money and they might be embarrassed by this. Call me back in fifteen minutes and I'll see if I can find some clients who'll be willing to talk to you."

So quickly I arranged for some actors to receive phone calls at their homes. Everybody gave testimonials, and it appeared in the *Washington Post*. I also got a phone call from the *Philadelphia Enquirer*, another Pulitzer Prize-winning publication, and the journalist, a 32-year-pro, took the story hook, line and sinker and it went out to countless papers around the country, picked up by other news and wire services and independents.

The paper wanted to send out an Associated Press photographer, but I didn't want any of them sent out because they might know me. I've used my same telephone number, same address, usually the same name, virtually undisguised for years. So I sent them a photograph of myself as Joe Bones—let's make it real obvious—and nobody recognized me. And I was quoted in papers all over the country: "There's no escaping the Fat Squad. We're on the job breakfast, lunch and dinner. We're even there in the middle of the night. The Fat Squad Commandos never sleep—Joe Bones." And I love the fact that Joe Bones is quoted in publications around the world.

It's wonderful getting up in the morning and thinking, "Today I think I'll be a scientist." It's like: every fantasy you ever wanted to do, every person you ever wanted to be, a great athlete—you can be it! You can be whoever you want to be, if only in your mind . . . but it becomes reality in the mind of everyone else, too! So, having created history, how can you believe in history?



This photograph of Joey Skaggs posing with one of his fish condominiums for upwardly mobile guppies appeared in *Life* magazine. Fish condominiums took off and went around the world in Italian, French, German, and Dutch publications.

■ AJ: People who write histories go back to the media, read a press story, and might miss the little article buried six months later in the bottom of the last page that says, "Oh, by the way, that was a hoax."

■ JS: Front page news; page 30, fine print, for the retraction!

The media can be used as a tool, can be used as a weapon, or can be a victim of its own inadequacies. And that's what happens—it makes some people heroes, some villains, and it also makes itself a problem for all society.

Back to the Fat Squad: I got a phone call from the producer of the *Good Morning America* show, David Hartman (which I've already been on for fish condos). *Good Morning America* wanted to talk to some commandos, so I again gave them some names, and I gave them clients who are diabetics, clients with health problems. They were looking for the "fun" side of it; they were actually contriving their own show on the subject.

So I gave them a funny story about a woman who got a birthday gift to lose some weight, from her husband. The commandos came over, and it was a problem sexually for them, etc. That's what they wanted to hear—Americans want to hear this kind of stuff and so does the world.

■ AJ: The commandos camp out in your house, basically?

■ JS: Yes! They're there all the time: on a date, when you go to lunch, when you go to the bathroom. They shake down the room, look for hidden contraband, search any visitors who might bring you a Twinkie, and they never sleep. If you put chocolate cake near your face they'll rip it out of your hand!

I went on the *Good Morning America* show with 6 commandos (6 actors), and a fake client who was also an actress. They interviewed Joe Bones for real. Of course the *New York Post* couldn't wait to lower the boom. I asked them to hold off because there were a number of people who knew it was me; I said, "Just wait, because I've got something else bigger than this!"

The "bigger than this" was: I was invited to go on an ABC show with world-famous diet people: the son of Pritikin, the

Cambridge Diet person, and a lot more people, and talk about my diet. I figured that's what I really wanted to do: *get* these exploiters ("Buy my book, buy my diet, make me rich! Six months later you'll be doing another diet—we know that, but we don't care; for now we just want to take your money!"). And I wanted to go on and have them agree with me: "Yes, it's like trying to quit smoking—they *do* need support; the first 3 days are crucial, and yes, they can beat their wife or kick their dog or yell at the kids, but they can't yell at a Fat Squad commando because he or she will beat the shit out of them and tie 'em to the bed if necessary! Yes, it's a great idea!" I wanted to get a kind of endorsement from them, or even a *non-endorsement*—create a controversy with these people. But, I couldn't hold back the forces that be (who were thinking, *would someone else beat 'em to the punch and pre-empt them?*) so I never got to do the Diet Special.

I also fooled the BBC, CNN, Japanese TV, French national television, Australian television, and wire services around the world. *Nou*, interestingly, the media is looking retrospectively at me—I'm not just the guy who did the Fat Squad. After 20 years of getting arrested and being beaten and condemned, I'm being applauded, and it's an interesting documentation of how values and people have changed.

I certainly don't think that I have changed that much. Originally I said, "I'm going to stand up for injustices, for hypocrisies, and make socio-political commentaries," and I have, but the times have changed. Now *Newsweek* magazine and other media credit me as an *artist* with a history, which then gives me verification: "He's done this, this and this." And I've never had that before; it was always credited to a hippie, yuppie, radical revolutionary, beatnik—whatever the current term was.

■ AJ: This is also in conjunction with the rise of the artist as a media star. Never before has so much publicity been given the club scene, the Andy Warhols, Keith Harings—the artist as rock star

■ JS: And the media's doing it! It's paradoxical and wonderful

RESEARCH PRANKS

1,421 New Fun Ideas!



INGREDIENTS: YES MEN, JOHN WATERS, MARGARET CHO, PAUL KRASSNER, RON ENGLISH, BILLBOARD LIBERATION FRONT, CACOPHONY SOCIETY, SUICIDE CLUB, JOEY SKAGGS, HACKERS, AND MORE.

J

OEY SKAGGS

The American godfather of pranks on the media is Joey Skaggs, who has been implementing his imaginative assault on media deceptiveness, political deceptiveness, and casual complacency/received wisdom for over three decades. In the tradition of Alfred Jarry, the founder of Pataphysics, Joey has been campaigning for media literacy and the necessity for a permanently skeptical attitude. Interview by V.Vale.

◆ **JOEY SKAGGS:** I created the first sexual, Virtual Reality hoax on the Internet.

◆ **VALE:** *Really? Tell us about that.*

◆ **JS:** It was called "SEXONIX." In 1993, I had a booth at an "inventors" show in Toronto. I had a banner made that said "SEXONIX," and sent out a provocative press release to the Canadian media describing my new enterprise. I said that I had six "sex pods," an age requirement, a health requirement (no heart conditions), and was promoting new software whereby you could experience a sensational, sensual fantasy.

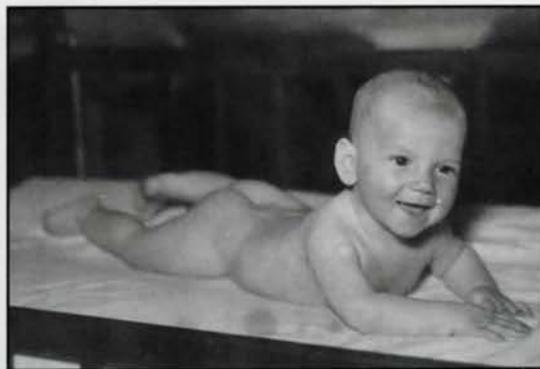
On opening day there were lines of people waiting to get into my booth, which was empty. I had an announcement put out that I had been busted at the Canadian border, and that \$300,000 of my hardware and software had been confiscated. Next I sent out a press release blasting the "repressive policies of the Canadian government," and began doing postings on the Well, an early Internet BBS, under the name "Joseph Skaggs, PhD."

On my Internet posting I explained my plight and asked for help in retrieving my equipment. People responded, blasting the Canadian government for their censorship. But someone finally said, "Wait a minute, Joseph Skaggs—isn't this the guy who did the 'Cathouse for Dogs' prank?" This was before pop-up ads, banner ads and the corporate invasion of the Net, when the early users thought the Internet was their sacred space and that whatever was said on the Internet was "real." One of the Well users was an investigative journalist. He made it his mission to follow the trail, to get to the truth. But when he called Canadian government officials, he could not work his way through the bureaucracy, which I knew would be the case. So the hoax continued.

As a result of the press releases, I got a call from a Canadian television show: "We've heard about what happened to you, and we're really upset with our government's policies. We're doing a show on Virtual Reality, and would like to include you. Do you have anything you can send us?" I said, "Well, the government confiscated everything, but I still have a commercial about SEXONIX." They said, "Send it."

I enlisted computer-animator friends and quickly put together a video commercial featuring a cartoon penis having sex with a cartoon vagina. As the penis is pumping away inside the vagina, they morph into this surreal sixties psychedelic explosion of multi-colored flowers. Finally, when the penis ejaculates, the company's name, "SEXONIX" is formed out of sperm-like letters. Other graphics were fabricated, like a hand connected to some wires moving a body and footage swiped from the movie *Lawnmower Man*. The Canadian TV show fell for it and used it in their hour-long show. They interviewed me and I said something like, "Virtual sex is masturbation of the mind."

◆ **V:** *You were riding the wave of social change. As J.G. Ballard said, "Sex times technology equals the*



Six-month-old Joey.

PRANKS 2: JOEY SKAGGS



future.”

◆ **JS:** I also believe that *revelation* helps bring about social change, and that’s what a prank does. It allows someone to believe in an illusion, and when the prank is revealed, a person’s consciousness changes hopefully.

◆ **V:** *Pranks may be our best tool for correcting the fascist direction our society seems to be headed—*

◆ **JS:** The *government* is perpetrating scams on us all the time: leading us into war, rigging voting machines, and allowing New Orleans to be destroyed, but these scams are never revealed whereas my kind of prank is intentionally revealed for the sake of social change and changing consciousness.

◆ **V:** *On your website it says you’ve done twenty annual April Fools’ Day Parades in New York City. How did that come about?*

◆ **JS:** It’s the longest-running prank I’ve ever executed. It began in 1986. Each year I send out an elaborate press release describing the theme, the floats, the celebrity look-alikes who will be marching, and encouraging the public to participate in costume and bring their own floats. The parade route starts at 59th Street and goes down Fifth Avenue to Washington Square Park, where we have concession stands, entertainment, live music, and the crowd nominates the King or Queen of Fools for the year

I send this press announcement out to the “Calendars” or “Editors” of a hundred or more major newspapers and wire services around the United States. If you are a reporter in Ohio and you get this, you might announce that “New York is having its twentieth annual April Fools’ Day Parade.” I’ve had radio shows do announcements on the hour, pretending to do color commentary: “I’m talking here with Joey Skaggs. So Joey, what kind of floats are you going to have?” And I describe the floats. In the background it sounds like a bunch of people are preparing for a parade.

This year, I rented a brand-new, extended-cab pickup truck and had actors drive it to 59th Street and Fifth Avenue, where the parade supposedly starts. I paid for giant banners to be placed on either side of the truck, advertising it as “The Airlines’ Lost Luggage Float.” The back of the truck was filled with a mountain of suitcases, laundry and crushed boxes.

This year, abc.com’s Buck Wolf showed up. He approached my actor “plants” with the truck, and when he told them there was no parade, true to

their script, they acted really upset: “What do you mean there isn’t going to be a parade?! We rented this truck and came all the way up from college.” He believed them, and went out and bought ‘em all hot dogs. Then he wrote me a chastising email: “You know, these poor kids spent all this time and money preparing for your parade. One of them even missed a test. This is terrible!”

◆ **V:** *You’ve done that for twenty years! Tell us about another prank.*

◆ **JS:** The Portofess. Playing the role of a priest, I built a confessional booth and mounted it on the back of an industrial-strength tricycle and pedaled it to the 1992 Democratic Convention to hear the confessions of politicians. I had actors dressed up as delegates allegedly coming up to give confession. People would enter the confession booth from the back. There were Gregorian chants playing on a concealed tape recorder, and I, sitting on the tricycle, would open a little door and listen to their confessions. I handed out a flyer that said: “The Church must go where the sinners are Religion on the move, for people on the go.”

To cover my butt, I had sent away to California to become a lifetime member of the Universal Life Church; it cost \$36. I wore a full Catholic cassock and looked the part.

The tricycle was beautifully custom-made by the only remaining bicycle manufacturing company in America, out on Long Island. When I ordered the tricycle, the company wanted to know what it was for, because they make delivery bikes for businesses like pizza parlors and grocery stores. I said, “I’m an artist, and I want a bike that can haul a sculpture weighing 500 pounds.” I ordered the bike painted all black to match the beautifully constructed confessional booth, which looked authentically Catholic. I had solid rubber tires so I wouldn’t get a flat, custom



shocks and special gearing. It was July and hotter than hell.

All kinds of people approached me. For example, a large group of pro-abortion protesters attacked me, believing I was a clergyman. They had stickers that said, "I fuck to cum, not to conceive" and they slapped them on me and on the confessional booth. For the first time in my life, the police came to my rescue! Clothes do make the man, and the police fell for it.

"Portofess" made the front page of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and was on CBS national television, CNN, FOX—you name it. It went global.

♦ **V:** *Tell us about another media prank.*

♦ **JS:** Dog Meat Soup. I wrote a letter [see box below] that I mailed out to 1,500 dog shelters—a lot of time, energy and money goes into acquiring information like that. The letter was written in really bad "Charlie Chan" English—it was a totally racist letter in desperate need of grammatical correction (intentionally).

♦ **V:** *What did you use as a return address?*

♦ **JS:** I had a PO Box at the MacDougal Street Copy Shop, those poor guys! They're good friends of mine. The owner at the time, and his assistant were African of East Indian ancestry. They always would say, "Hey Joey, we want to be in a hoax!" I had been coming in and photocopying newspaper and magazine articles there for years, and gotten to know them well.

When this "Dog Meat Soup" hoax happened, police, private investigators and news media stormed the copy shop looking for a Korean guy, Kim Yung Soo—which was my alias. Abe and Raoul (the owner and his assistant) shivered in their shoes but never gave me up. They told everyone that the Korean came in once a week to pick up his mail.

On my answering machine I had a message both in Korean and English, spoken by a Korean woman friend, with dogs barking in the background sounding like they were about to be thrown into a soup pot. I never answered the phone, but recorded all the voice messages, most of which were very hostile and racist, as well as the offers to buy or sell dogs. I believe the offers were attempts at entrapment.

People went ballistic. They went fucking ballistic! They apparently found out my home address through the phone company, and assumed I was the dog broker for the Korean company. I had a garden apartment in a brownstone on Waverly Place by Washington Square Park. I had to sneak out the backyard, hop the fence and go through my neighbor's place to buy groceries. There were people staked outside, around the

clock, waiting for me to surface. These people had traced me to that address, thinking I had dogs in the back yard. There were investigators on the roofs nearby, trying to see if I had any hidden kennels. People slid cards underneath my door saying, "Open up, we know you're in there." They were banging on the windows. The phone was constantly ringing. I never answered that particular line.



Sitting in the darkness, I recorded all the incoming messages, keeping a log. I spoke daily with my rep at my clipping service, letting him listen to the incoming calls and the banging on the windows and door. He read me some of the clippings they were collecting; there were journalists claiming they had spoken with the Koreans and had made appointments to sell them dogs. There were animal lovers and activists, telling everybody this was really real—they were lying, for their own cause.

♦ **V:** *What an amazing prank. How do you come up with these ideas?*

♦ **JS:** I always say that *my imagination is my biggest muscle*. I believe that one can learn to think in ways that help a creative process. There are approaches like *juxtaposition: ironic reversal*. Taking it and flipping it. You take a subject and say, "How can I make a comment about this that will interest people? What can I associate it with?"

What can I put next to it?" Those are techniques one can use to help come to a workable way of producing a satire. Again, there are so many elements involved in doing it, you know. You need the time and the patience and some financing, of course. I pay for all of this myself.

◆ **V:** Tell us about your "Hair Today, Ltd." Prank—

◆ **JS:** This was the time I decided to do two hoaxes simultaneously. In my studio I had a number of actors playing secretaries. I installed two auxiliary phone lines, one for "Comacocoon," where anaesthetized patients could take computerized dream vacations, and

Dear Executive Director,

Excuse my English, please. Thank you. First, congratulation on all your good work with animal. We support. We would like to help your company make money. So we like to offer help so you make money. Dog shelter kill million of dog. cost money. Dog shelter cremate dog cost money. Dog shelter need money to operate. Where it get money? Hard to get money.

Many people like to eat dog. People need to eat dog. Where do they get dog? Some people they raise dog to eat. Some steal dog, make some people angry, hurt some people. That not right.

We like make proposal to your dog shelter to sell us dog. You save money, you make money. We buy all dog regardless of size or color. We prefer big, young, strong dog but we take all dog from your shelter. We cook dog in America. We can dog in America and sell in Asian marketplace.

Lot people in America eat dog. Most dog we ship oversea. Lot people eat dog. Many country eat dog. Korea, China eat dog. Philippines, Japan, Thailand, Cambodia eat dog. Dog is healthy for you. This way your cost of business is less. You make more money, more people happy. You get cleaner air. No burn up dog. No waste dog. People pet no disappear. Everybody happy.

Cause we understand some people no like idea to eat dog. But they make trouble for people who like eat dog. Those people called two-faced. Those people eat cow, rabbit and mice, squirrel and frog and everything else, but still give us trouble.

But dog is good food. Dog is good medicine, make sick people strong, make old people young, make penis hard, make sex good again.

Our business getting very big. Need more dog. We are prepared to offer you 10 cents per pound per dog. We pick up dog everyday, so you also save on feeding dog. We like very much to speak with you and make deal. Please tell us how many dog are available in your business. We have deal already to do the same with dog shelter in New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts. We hope to be eventually in big city cross America.

You can join us now, save money and continue doing your good job. We do big business together. We have big business already with many dog breeder and many dog hospital. Dog no suffer. We have quick death for dog.

Looking to hear from you soon.

Thank you,

Kim Yung Soo, President

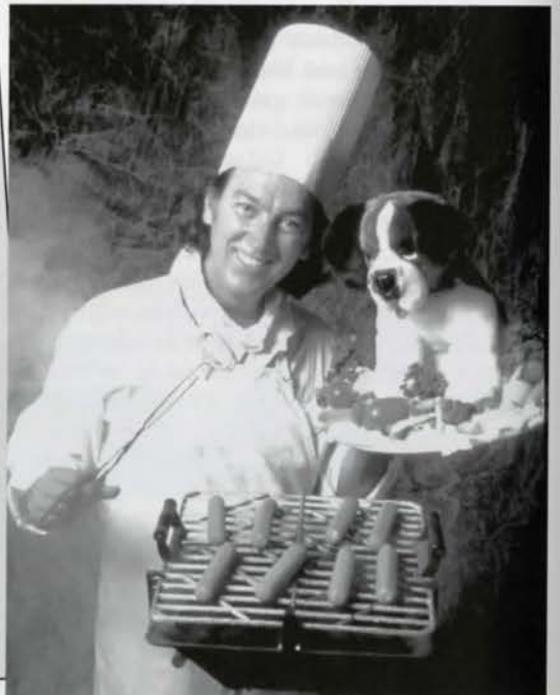
one for "Hair Today," which offered a permanent cure for baldness." My apartment had a large living room so I could have two fake offices operating simultaneously. Normally, I put in an auxiliary phone line dedicated to the hoax so that when the hoax is over, I can get rid of it.

To do two pranks simultaneously, I needed two different P.O. boxes with two different addresses. In "Hair Today" I posed as a Native American surgeon offering scalp transplants from cadavers. I produced a brochure advertising the concept and seeking scalp donors: men and women with beautiful heads of hair who were in high-risk professions such as deep-sea divers, undercover narcotics detectives, or whatever. We would give you money in exchange for your scalp upon your untimely demise. How much we gave depended on the condition of your scalp, i.e., if you had scars or moles, etc.

Then we supposedly had bald people lined up who would pay thousands of dollars to receive a healthy head of hair. However, they would forever be on immuno-suppressant drugs.

A Native American doctor doing scalp transplants? How totally over the top can you get? To produce the brochure, I bought three different wigs which friends wore posing for "before and after" photographs. In the "before" photo they would be frowning, and in the "after" photo they would look really happy with this silly wig stuck on their heads.

I mailed the brochure and a fake ad, soliciting



donors, to news organizations. I did the same thing for "Comacocoon" The brochure for that one promoted the various dream vacations you could take (the Rip Van Winkle, the Sleeping Beauty, the Gulliver's Travels) for a time period ranging from a weekend to two weeks. During your "dream vacation" you could get a tan, have your teeth cleaned, give up smoking and learn a foreign language, or you could create your own fantasy. The hoax got coverage all over the country and around the world.

I got busted for the "Comacocoon" prank—something like 17 charges were brought against me. I had used the name Dr. Schlafer, which is Yiddish and German for sleep. Dr. Sleep!—come on, obvious clue. One journalist who worked for a national tabloid became very suspicious because whenever he called, my secretaries would not put Dr. Schlafer on the phone—he was always busy or out of the office. The journalist, who must have understood German, thought the whole thing was a front for drug dealing, so he called the police and other government agencies and told them I was a drug dealer.

The police went to the P.O. box address on LaGuardia Place and the woman who owned the business, probably terrified, told them my street address, which was 107 Waverly Place. Somehow, accidentally, the 7 was left off and they thought the address was 10 Waverly Place. So the police raided the wrong building. Eventually they got to the right address, but by then they were *really* pissed off. At the time I didn't know about any of this. I had no clue.

So, we're all busy doing "hoax central" when suddenly I hear all this banging on the door: "Open up! This is the police! Do you want to do this the hard way or the easy way?" I peeked through the peephole and saw a detective holding up his gold shield. I opened the door. I had four actors in the apartment, the phones are ringing off the hook, and the cops come in saying: "What's going on?" And I say, "What do you mean?" One detective says, "We're here to bust you." So I tell the actors they can leave, and the detective says, "Sit down, no one's going anywhere!" From the looks on their faces, these poor women are thinking, "What have I gotten myself into? I don't know anything!"

One detective sees my baseball bat by the door and picks it up, "You play ball." I answer, "I used to." He says, "Where?" I say, "Brooklyn, when I was a kid." He then asks, "Okay, where did you go to college?" I tell him, "New York." But that's



too vague for him. He asks, "Riker's?" That's when I realize he was using street slang—"going to college" to him meant, "Where did you serve time in prison?" I tell him, "Wait a minute. I do hoaxes." "You do what?" "I'm doing hoaxes. Let me show you some stuff." I pull out some press for the Cat House for Dogs and other pranks and after what seems like an eternity, they finally get it. They let on that a journalist tipped them off, but appreciating what I'm doing, and realizing I'm not breaking the law, they agree not to reveal the truth to him. But now they ask if I would be willing to work teaching cops about scamming. I'm going, "Yeah, right!"

Political figures provide a goldmine of opportunities for satire. The challenge is to construct something that hits the nail on the head in a funny, offbeat way. In 1992, the Dinkins Administration's ineptness at governing New York was the perfect target. The city was going broke and the infrastructure was crumbling. They were grasping at straws for solutions. I faked an interoffice memo from Mayor David Dinkins to his staff (I had a mole on the inside provide me with a copy of his signature), and then I leaked it to the press. It proposed that the City use a lottery to sell the Brooklyn Bridge. They could raise the millions they needed to fix the bridge and some lucky person would win a million dollars plus have the bridge named after him or her for five years. When the media flooded the Mayor's office, they swore they had no plans to sell the Brooklyn Bridge. But, in the world of politics, no one knew what to believe. An Italian newspaper journalist thought it was a great idea and suggested it might even work for the dilapidated Ponte Vecchio in Florence.



◆ **V:** *Did 9/11 affect the ability to do pranks?*

◆ **JS:** After 9/11, New York Senator, Charles Schumer, tried to make hoaxing illegal. After 9/11, doing hoaxes got to be a scary proposition.

In 1998, I did a hoax where I created a new weapon. The history of humanity boils down to the evolution of weaponry. Basically it goes like this: I'm a caveman, you're a caveman. You don't like me so you hit me with a rock. I sharpen the rock and I stick it in your ribs. You put a stick on the sharpened rock and you stick me back. I make a bow and arrow. You make a gun. I make a bigger gun. If we look at our history, that's what it is about: the progressive invention of weaponry. Now we fear anthrax, dirty bombs, suitcase bombs, terrorists getting hold of a nuclear weapon. I decided to take weaponry to another level, so I created the "Stop BioPeep" hoax.

I gave a lecture at the University of Tennessee. Afterward, a dark haired, bearded man with a deep voice and his suit jacket draped European style over his shoulders said to me, "Eye vant to be in hoax." I said, "Great!" It turned out that he was a mathematician at the J. Stefan Institute in Ljubljana. This is a very prestigious scientific facility.

A number of months later, I went to Australia to speak at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, and met some brilliant students who were working on their doctorates in genetics, psychology and mathematics. We went out afterwards, and, as frequently happens, these students also asked if they could help do a prank.

So, with all this help from different parts of the world, I was able to put together "Stop BioPeep," an international hoax that took almost two years to pull off. In the hoax, I claimed that a multinational corporation was developing **genes of addiction** to further their global marketing domination, selling products for human consumption. But the U.S. government and some of its allies found out about it and, realizing the new weapon potential, co-opted it.

They believed that through DNA identification they would be able to target specific races. There are 1.3 billion Chinese people who are going to take over and pollute the world. There are over a billion Indians. There are millions of poor starving Africans. There are just too many people. How can we get rid of these racial groups without some kind of retaliatory strike? Perhaps one could feed them all a cola (or something else they've become addicted to) containing a deadly virus that is time-coded through genetic modifi-

cation to activate at a pre-determined time, while making a profit. Then all the targeted people would die within minutes of each other, melting from the inside out. Something worse than Ebola. They wouldn't know what hit them!

In essence, the hoax consisted of a fake exposé of this hideous plot. I created the persona of a famous Australian humanitarian (played by me) who had been informed by a defector about the BioPeep plot and made it his mission to alert the world about this heinous research.

I staged demonstrations in Brisbane, Australia and in New York at the United Nations. I had made T-shirts of a two-headed chicken that my actors wore at the protests (chickens were being used as guinea pigs to identify the genes of addiction). I sent press releases to the news media all over the world attempting to expose the government's involvement and their intent with this weapon.

Because of this, journalists in Slovenia descended on the J. Stefan Institute. The director, knowing nothing about this, appeared on TV denying everything. I got a call from my Slovene co-conspirator who was really freaked out: "The media are here; they're after my boss who doesn't know anything about this and I'm probably going to get fired." (We'd used his real name, phone number and mailing address to give the hoax credibility). I told him, "I don't want to get you fired. Just tell the truth. Tell them it is a hoax orchestrated by me."

Then there was a Slovene shit storm. Some people were angry, but some were very pleased. And they invited me back to Slovenia to discuss the issues raised by the Stop BioPeep prank. I returned there and discussed the hoax and its issues and the media covered it extensively. That is the kind of coverage you want, because it is talking about the real issues.

◆ **V:** *The follow-up coverage—*

◆ **JS:** Yes. Usually the follow-up coverage is minuscule, because the media does not like to dwell on the fact that they were "had." But the after-the-fact coverage that discusses the ramifications and the intent is far more important than the coverage one gets for just launching a hoax.

After this happened and died down, I was invited to Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil, to give presentations at a couple of universities. By a strange coincidence, a Slovene student made an announcement that he had won first prize in a world competition in computer programming that took place in Rio. He was hailed as a national hero by the Slovene media and the president of the country (he had received the equivalent of

\$60,000 US from the government to prepare for this contest.) However, it turned out that the kid had lied and had taken the money to Rio and had a good time with it. Upon closer examination, no one could find the organization that supposedly hosted the contest. Because I had just pulled the "Stop BioPeep" prank partially in Slovenia, the media there made a connection, alleging that I was the mastermind behind this kid's fraudulent winning of the contest!

I, in my impish way, decided to accept responsibility for this just to see what would happen. So, when the media called, I said "Congratulations! You've done a good job! You got me!" I, of course, was putting them on again. The media became frenzied with accusations and assumptions, none of which could be substantiated. It was a riot. The news reports even went so far as to suggest that I had committed a crime and should be thrown in a Slovene jail. This is all on my website under the name "Scandal in Slovenia."

◆ **V:** *How did you get out of that?*

◆ **JS:** I went back to Slovenia, explained the real story of what had happened, and even got to meet the President of Slovenia. He liked what I was doing to the media, and became a fan. So I am famous in Slovenia—they even featured me in their Slovene *Playboy*.

Slovenia borders Austria, Italy, Croatia and Hungary. You can be in Venice in two hours; Graz, Austria is only an hour-and-a-half away. Slovenia is a wonderful country that very few people actually know about. The landscape is beautiful; the people are great. They all speak five languages; the food and wine are wonderful. Every time I crossed the border and showed a passport, they gleefully shouted, "Joey Skaggs! Joey Skaggs!" They recognized me because I was such a controversial figure in their media for so long over this giant scandal. So now I'm thinking of retiring to Slovenia!

◆ **V:** *You must have a fairly huge archive of the pranks you've done—*

◆ **JS:** I have accumulated over forty years of archival material. Over the years I've laminated the front page of the publication whether I'm on it or not, and also the page that I'm actually on.

It's always a funny contrast between the headline news with its serious or scary stories, and whatever absurd story I've created. I like the juxtaposition of that.

I have literally thousands of articles, and now I'm in the process of trying to figure out how to preserve them. I have to either digitally photograph them or scan them and put them on CDs and DVDs. I still have to hang on to the originals. If I don't laminate them, they turn yellow or brown and fall apart.

◆ **V:** *You have to keep them away from both light and moisture. I still have original issues of Search and Destroy for sale. I stored them in black plastic garbage bags inside cardboard boxes.*

◆ **JS:** Well, you hope that the mice and the bugs

don't get to them. But archiving stuff is a real problem. I've been digitizing the TV shows I've been on. There are a couple hundred hours of video; I've been appearing on shows for many years. It's fun to look at, if you don't mind watching yourself get old. [laughs] But at least I have the historical documentation of the work. If I didn't have this stuff, and I was just telling stories, nobody would believe me.

◆ **V:** *All of us probably hope that after we die, our work can continue to have some inspirational value. I can see a version of ourselves living on forever*

on the Internet. Unless of course, the coming worldwide electrical storms wipe out everything computerized—

◆ **JS:** We'll have back-ups, though.

◆ **V:** *The Internet has turned out to house everyone's resumé: "If you want to see my work, go to my website." In fact, you can't trust anyone who doesn't have a website. They have no provenance.*

◆ **JS:** If you can trust the website.

◆ **V:** *That's true; you can hardly trust anything, period. You can construct any number of phony identities on the Internet.*

◆ **JS:** At least the Internet is an excellent tool for reaching people around the world. I was just in China and had to show some people something on my website, in the hotel business center. And there it was. I could explain my work to them while showing them everything.

◆ **V:** *That's amazing, because you no longer have to carry around a huge portfolio. So you travel around*





the world giving lectures under the rubric of "Media Studies"?

♦ **JS:** I still lecture at art schools, for festivals, journalism organizations, colleges and universities all over the world, often under the heading of "Media Activism," "Media Communications," or "Media Literacy." It's important that people know how the media works and how it affects them.

♦ **V:** *Many of your hoaxes have been made possible by journalists not verifying basic information—*

♦ **JS:** And on one level I thank them for that. Because I'm able to use their inadequacies to illustrate other issues.

♦ **V:** *There's a lot on your website; who put it up?*

♦ **JS:** Friends. My website and my pranks are made possible by all the people who volunteer to perform in my work. Without their participation, I don't think I could do the work on such a large scale. Some of my hoaxes have involved scores of people.

♦ **V:** *Now, pranks are on mainstream television (in programs like Punk'd and Jackass)—mostly the kind that victimize people who are already victims. What's your take on this?*

♦ **JS:** What has happened in all the media, from television to Shock Jock radio, is that the bar has been lowered for substance and raised for the amount of sensationalism. It seems like you have to have more "effects" and more outrageous behavior in order to get attention and higher ratings. It's the same way with hoaxes.

♦ **V:** *Do you have anything more to say about Pranks after 9/11?*

♦ **JS:** Well, after 9/11, everyone started receiving white powder in envelopes! That was a popular hoax that shut down Post Offices—they called it a hoax but it was actually a crime. I wrote about it in a piece called "This Isn't Funny." It had the effect of law-makers wanting to outlaw pranks and hoaxes; it was very chilling. First of all, I don't condone mailing out white powder. It's really a hostile attack intended to inspire just one emotion—fear.

There are definitely attempts to remove rights,

certainly the right to dissent, and that's what we do. We're creative dissenters, and when those rights are removed, then what do you do? How do you influence people to think about things in a different way? One of my aims is to get people to re-examine issues and to possibly have another opinion about something, to come to a different conclusion. But, you know, if I had done my "Stop BioPeep" hoax after 9/11, where I was accusing the United States of creating a new weapon designed to attack genetic types, I would probably be arrested!

♦ **V:** *Fortunately, you weren't.*

♦ **JS:** We are all stuck with, "How am I going to be effective? What am I going to do or say that's going to influence people?" What we are talking about are artists using information as a weapon of mass communication for the intent of making people realize that the direction they are going is not a good idea.

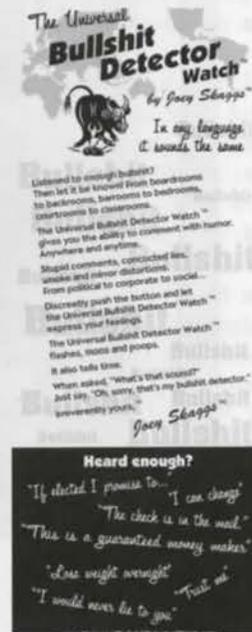
We use certain liberties to communicate: free speech, the Internet, snail-mail, telephone and FAX machines, theater in a public place—as tools to access the media. If these liberties are limited by law, then artists will have to come up with a different way of communicating, or, break the law. If you have such conviction and passion that you *must* do and say what is on your mind, then you

will end up doing it whether it's legal or not. But if you break the law, you risk ending up in a legal loop or in jail—and you will no longer be either a working artist or a threat.

I have always taken great pains to be *legal*, because I do not want to be incarcerated.

♦ **V:** *Even though you're a godfather-status prankster, you may also be a real artist. You got flown to Spain to do an art installation called "Art Attack." Tell us about that.*

♦ **JS:** "Art Attack" came about because I was invited to do an installation—the kind of thing I don't usually do—at a museum, the Espai D'Art Contemporani (EACC) in Castellon, Spain, which is north of Valencia and south of Barcelona. It's an affluent part of Spain where



Spanish tile is made, with very low unemployment. The city built a beautiful new museum with a marble facade and they are very proud of it. I said I was interested in doing something about terrorism. Soon after our first conversations, 9/11 occurred. They said, "We've thought about this and we don't think we can do it." I replied, "No, this is the time when you *must* do it. Now it's more important than ever, because of 9/11."

They invited me over to talk to them and have a look at the facility. I noticed that the museum's marble facade was already being vandalized, and that vandals were also destroying the art that was outside. So I decided to adapt my concept to fit the situation.

My installation included a surveillance camera scrutinizing the side of the building. The city provided police barricades that I put six feet in front of the museum and along the entire length of the building. Then I drew chalk outlines of dead bodies inside and outside of the barrier.

Inside the museum, I had a video arcade game painted in a military camouflage pattern. On it I mounted a fake .45 caliber pistol. A video cartoon of Uncle Sam and American soldiers played on a loop, and there was a place where you could enter your initials to keep your score. It was a typical arcade shoot 'em up game. When you pushed the start button, the game went from the animation loop to the real footage from the surveillance camera outside, showing you real life in real time. You aimed the pistol at the actual people walking around outside of the museum. When you pulled the trigger and shot at them, you would hear gunshots going off through speakers both inside and outside the museum. Then there would be cartoon bullet holes on the screen showing where you shot the people.

♦ **V:** *This was breaking down the barriers between virtual experience and "real" experience—*

♦ **JS:** Yes. If you were shooting at real people and hearing the sound effects, there was an element of "terrorist" reality here that was scary. We posted warnings outside: "You are entering an Art Attack Zone." And I had a loud speaker outside

the museum, announcing in several languages that vandals of this museum and its art would be shot. Survivors would be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

Interestingly, the installation was vandalized. Some people broke in, smashed the game and stole the gun and the projector that broadcast the image from the surveillance camera. The piece was down for a week before the museum staff could get it rebuilt.

This piece received media coverage in Europe because it was so provocative. Again, it was a rare occurrence for me to get this kind of art world attention. I was very pleased that this museum in Spain had the courage to host the installation.

♦ **V:** *Tell us about another prank.*

♦ **JS:** Let me tell you about "Save the Geoduck." I



was invited to appear on a talk show in Seattle. While there I went to the Pike Place Market, where they have these fish stalls. On ice was a giant clam called a "geoduck" (pronounced "goeey"). It is indigenous to Puget Sound, can live 160 years and attain a weight of up to fifteen pounds. The geoduck has what looks like the penis of a horse protruding from the shell. It's used to ingest food and move around in the sand.

At this time, the American media were focusing on Japan-bashing. The news media were showing blue-collar workers smashing Toyotas and Sony TVs and blaming the

trade imbalance and their loss of jobs on the Japanese. I saw the geoduck as an opportunity to make a very thinly veiled anti-Japanese penis joke and expose the existence of prejudice and bias.

Now when doing a prank, I try to always use some facsimile of my name, like "Jo Jo the Gypsy," or "J.J." windsurfing from Hawaii to California, or "Joe Bones." So I was "Dr. Richard J. Long." As Dr. Dick Long, I was a marine biologist and environmental activist leading a campaign to stop the Japanese from eating the geoduck.

I sent out a press release with an 8"x10" glossy photo of me in a suit on the docks of Seattle holding a geoduck. I said that the Chernobyl nuclear disaster had more far-reaching



effects than originally detected. Lapland reindeer and their antlers had become radioactive because of the contaminated lichen they were eating. They were no longer suitable for the Japanese, who I claimed had been eating the ground-up antlers as an aphrodisiac. So they turned to the geoduck. I asserted that we shouldn't be allowing our natural resources to be eaten into extinction by foreigners using it as an aphrodisiac.

Claiming to be very offended, I sent out this press kit to news outlets around the country. People in the Pacific Northwest knew what the geoduck was, so they immediately jumped on the story. People on the East Coast thought, "Wait a minute, this can't be real." But as soon as they realized that the geoduck actually existed, they no longer questioned the premise.

On weekdays it can be difficult to get a large crowd to do a hoax, but I managed to get a few diehard faithful friends to stage a demonstration outside the Japan Society Building in Manhattan. Since I was out of town, I faxed information to them, telling them to say that Dr. Long was in Seattle taking care of some legal matters and couldn't make it, so the demonstration was going to be called off until he could fly to New York City. Then they would stage a bigger demonstration.

But the news media interviewed the demonstrators anyway, giving them the opportunity to explain the plight of the geoduck. In the NBC broadcast story, the correspondent said he had called the Museum of Natural History, and was told they hadn't heard of the geoduck. But he and his news crew went to Chinatown, where they found some. The report that ensued showed the reporter holding one up, saying, "And you wonder why they think it's an aphrodisiac?!" pointing to this giant schlong hanging out of the clamshell. All the newscasters in the studio could not contain their laughter at this obvious penis joke. But they ran it as news anyway.

I was able to access the news media with a penis joke that was anti-Japanese. Announcers, newscasters and even the weatherman made jokes about it all week long. I have all these clips. One of the necessary elements of documenting the work is hiring a press clipping service for both print and electronic coverage. This is how I'm able to keep tabs on how these stories circulate through the media. This is the only way I have been able to maintain an accurate archive. You can't just rely on friends and word-of-mouth, because things slip by.

Here are the necessary tools for perpetrating a hoax: not only having a provocative idea with

some plausibility and some sort of sensationalism built into it, but a good press release, the promise of good visuals, a location, a phone number and now, of course, an Internet presence—all for the appearance of validity. Plus you need some sort of post office box address, a phone line dedicated just to the hoax, and the ability to follow up and keep it alive.

So for any future media satirist or prankster wondering (because they don't teach this in schools, of course) what is necessary to perpetrate and follow through, I have written a recipe on "How to Catch and Cook a Journalist." It's on my website, and has only ever been published in Slovenia, because nobody else would touch the piece.

♦ **V:** *That sounds truly educational Can you think of another prank?*

♦ **JS:** When I was teaching at the School of Visual Arts in New York, Channel Four from England called. They asked if I had ever fooled the British news media, and could they challenge me to do it? I told them I already had. For example, the BBC had fallen for the "Fat Squad" [described in the *RE/Search Pranks* book]

The producer said they wanted to follow me around while I executed a hoax in London. I said, "Sure!" The story I made up was that my parents had been missionaries living with the Masai who were killed by lions when I was a child. I had overcome a painful childhood and had realized my calling in life was to help other disenfranchised kids with emotional and substance abuse problems. I based my work on the premise that, yes, we have a reptilian brain but we also have a mammalian brain, and I wanted to heal the wounded animal within us. I was concocting this based on a mix of philosophies, including an interesting book I'd read years ago by Elias Canetti, called *Crowds and Power*, and lots of other popular psychobabble.

Mimicking Canetti, I said that the lion is the "King of the Jungle" because he is an arrogant creature. He roars before the kill, and that is a command to flee. If you don't flee, the penalty is death. As humans, we are forced to obey commands but we are damaged by the resentment created by having to execute those commands. Some of us can escape the "stings" of this domination, while others turn in on themselves and consequently on others.

I created a manifesto based on this philosophy, combined with popular mumbo jumbo presenting something absurd but plausible. Friends in fringe news media helped me to fabricate a couple of "published" articles in the U.S. and Canada. My

persona was “Baba Wa Simba” (Swahili for the lion king), a therapist who would heal the “inner animal.” The therapy was to reenact life in a lion’s den. My patients were my “pride,” and would do therapy on the floor: roaring to find their inner animal, crawling on all fours and taking group naps.

All this bullshit was then sent to the British news media with an announcement that Baba Wa Simba the therapist was coming to England to visit his pride of lions, the disenfranchised kids of East London. I checked into a hotel courtesy of Channel Four, and added the name “Baba Wa Simba” to my hotel registration so that if anyone called for Baba, they would ring my room. Kids in an acting school were recruited and I rehearsed them for a couple of days. We rented a parish hall, made a bunch of banner signs welcoming Baba Wa Simba to London.

The news media started calling, wanting to attend one of these “roaring sessions.” So I got fifty hamburgers and had all my actors on their hands and knees eating off the floor—not very British. They would start with a low guttural growl, which would slowly develop into a full, throat-wrenching roar. Pretty soon all the kids were hoarse. Without exception, every member of the news media got down on their hands and knees and roared along with these kids who were playing their part to the hilt. They reported things like, “Feels good, actually!” and “It is therapeutic!”

♦ V: Yeah, like Primal Screaming.

♦ JS: Of course. So Channel Four ran this exposé about my visit to London, fooling the Morning Show, the Noon Show, Sky News, etc. They focused on the British news media that fell for the hoax. But while I was in England, a famous Brazilian news host from TV Globo who was visiting London, requested to tape a segment for broadcast in Brazil and Portugal—and he too got down on his hands and knees and roared.

Years later, when I was invited to speak at Catholic University in Sao Paulo and Federal University in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, I got a call from *Veja*, a very popular Brazilian news magazine, wanting to do an advance profile on me. They asked if I had ever fooled the Brazilian news media, and I told them what had happened in London.

The *Lion King* movie had recently come out, and it was perfect timing—everybody had Disney on his or her minds. Here I was acting like the Lion King, and I work with disenfranchised youth. So this journalist says that this is very interesting and he wants to check into this, and can he please call me back? He calls back saying that he talked to TV Globo and they claim I am lying. I tell him I have a news clip of the guy doing it. He says, “You have a clip?” I tell him I have clips of everything I’ve ever done, and I’ll bring it down to Brazil. He says, “Okay.”

So I fly down to Brazil and in the auditorium it’s standing room only. I’m showing video clips of my work, and when I get to the Baba Wa Simba





piece, the journalist who wrote the article stands up. He tells the audience that TV Globo denied they had fallen for my prank. So I say, "I have a gift for the audience." I play the tape, which starts out with the TV Globo news host talking off camera while footage of real African lions is shown. The audience starts screaming and applauding, because they recognize this guy's voice—that's how famous he is; he's like Walter Cronkite—and there he is on his hands and knees, roaring.

After the presentation, these guys whisk me off to the *Veja* editorial office where I show the video again. The next issue has a follow-up story with a photo of the TV Globo guy on his hands and knees roaring

It was a "Fuck you" to TV Globo: "You said I was lying but here's the proof."

◆ **V:** *It's so important you had that tape—*

◆ **JS:** Without the tape no one would have believed me.

◆ **V:** *What about your "Sex Tapes Save Marriage" hoax?*

◆ **JS:** Some pranks are opportunistic—they just get dropped in your lap. Faith Daniels was looking for people to talk about "How Sex Tapes Saved Our Marriage." So I enlisted a fake "Mr. and Mrs. Joey Skaggs" to go on her show: a Caucasian Joey and a fiery dark-skinned Cuban Mrs. Skaggs. (You gotta juice it up, y'know.) She was a *babe*, too. The guy playing me was this skinny bald actor—it was really wonderful.

So they sent the limo and I had the fake couple waiting at my studio to be picked up. They had showed up early in the morning to do some preliminary preparation, and then went to the interview. They talked about how even on pizza you need to have different toppings; if the pizza's always the same, it gets boring. It was stupid, but that was the format of the show.

After the show aired, I sent out an announcement that Faith Daniels had been hoaxed. When journalists called her for a comment, her producers said it wasn't true. They claimed that this Joey Skaggs guy and his wife had *crashed* the show, and that they were not invited guests. Yes that is what lengths they will go to: they will lie, Lie, LIE! The public doesn't have a clue as to what lengths these people will go to to "construct" the news, to construct these shows, and how much they are willing to lie.

◆ **V:** *Did the show actually air?*

◆ **JS:** Of course it aired. I've got the clips. When I did the "Cat House for Dogs," one publication, having fallen for the hoax, did a second article



claiming they knew it was a hoax, but they were just going along with it to test the intelligence of their audience. Anything to save face!

◆ **V:** *Can you tell us about the Bush Fourth of July [2004] prank?*

◆ **JS:** A carpenter friend and I spent months building an 8' by 8' model of the White House. I had shown him the back side of a twenty dollar bill and asked him, "Can you make this?" He jokingly replied, "How many do you want?" I said, "No, not the bill, the White House on the bill!" I mounted it on the tricycle that I had used for the Portofess. I recruited friends and improv actors to play "Bushette" cheerleaders, a choir, the Saudi royal family, Bush's cabinet, a marching band and Bush supporters.

We printed up fake money to fill an attaché case, and had "Bush/Cheney for President" signs, a giant "Bush!" banner, American flags and red-white-and-blue balloons. A block-long parade of people gathered at Waverly Place at noon. Led by drummers, we marched into Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village. The public perceived the parade to be a pro-Bush parade because on the surface it was a pro-Bush parade. People were screaming and jeering, "Why?!" and "What the fuck are you doing?!" and "Get the fuck out of here! Are you crazy?!"

I was dressed as Uncle Sam pedaling this giant White House. We got to the arch in Washington Square Park, which was full of people—mostly tourists, since it was a holiday. The performers made a giant semi-circle around the "White House." We were flanked by my Secret Service people in black suits wearing American flag pins

on their lapels with commando-type earpieces they were talking into. Yellow police tape was stretched out to create an aisle for the ever-growing crowd to come up to the White House to pay their respects to the "President."

I made a brief speech through a megaphone and then opened the door to the White House, revealing it to be an outhouse! Inside was a mannequin with a mask of President Bush dressed in a kid's cowboy outfit: hat, chaps and six-shooters. His pants were pulled down, exposing his Sponge Bob underwear and a chimpanzee t-shirt. He was taking a shit and wiping his ass with toilet paper made of hundred dollar bills. I had little shelves inside the White House on which I placed toy American soldiers, and little oil barrels.

There were also toy Abrams tanks and Humvees on the floor, which was covered with sand. A translucent skylight with the face of President Bush on a crescent moon lit the White House. Behind the Bush mannequin's head was a picture of Jesus praying. There were pictures of Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden and John Kerry framed as NRA targets on the walls. The inside of the door had the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Bush had changed key words with a grease pencil.

The crowd's jeers turned to cheers once they realized what was going on inside! This was an enormous project: building the White House and getting all the people and props together. I had originally planned to take this piece to the Republican Convention which was happening soon, but I realized that I probably could never get there pedaling through the streets with an eight foot wide, eight foot tall sculpture on a tri-cycle with a hundred people in tow. We'd be stopped blocks from the convention center and the piece would likely have been searched and possibly destroyed.

♦ **V:** *Right, it would have been confiscated before anyone could see it—*

♦ **JS:** After I had spent months and thousands of dollars on preparation, plus the effort of all my friends, I didn't want to take the risk. Of course, there was the chance that we would have been stopped at Washington Square Park as well and arrested but I was prepared for that. It would have made a hell of a story well, that's enough! Go to my website to find other pranks I've done. ♦♦♦



DEATH GOT YOU
DOWN?
AT LAST AN ALTERNATIVE!!!

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ATTENTION NEWS ASSIGNMENT & CALENDAR EDITORS :

The New York April Fools' Committee Is Proud to Announce

NEW YORK CITY'S 28th ANNUAL APRIL FOOLS' DAY PARADE

Forget the Big Bang Theory, Let's Just Go Out With a Big Bang!

The **28th Annual April Fools' Day Parade** will begin at Fifth Avenue and 59th Street at 12 noon, Monday, April 1, 2013. Rain or shine, the parade will march down Fifth Avenue to Washington Sq. Park for the climactic selection of the King of Fools from the costumed marching look-alikes.

The **New York April Fools' Day Parade** was created in 1986 to remedy a glaring omission in New York's ethnic and holiday parades. These events fail to recognize the importance of April 1st, the day designated to commemorate the folly of mankind. In an attempt to bridge this gap and bring people back in touch with their inherent foolishness, the parade annually crowns a King of Fools from parading look-alikes.

The theme for this year's parade is "**Forget the Big Bang Theory, Let's Just Go Out With a Big Bang.**" The parade blasts off with **John Lee Hooker's** hit "**Boom Boom Boom Boom.**" **Grand Marshall Gen. David Petraeus** plays lead kazoo with the **Up Your Wazoo Marching Band** and is joined by N. Korean, Russian, Syrian, Iranian, Israeli and Chinese military processions showing off their big-bang bombs.

Setting the pace for the floats will be **Lance Armstrong and his U.S. Postal Service Pro Cycling Team**, which will be much slower this year as the team is no longer using performance enhancing drugs. The first float will be the **Room Temperature IQ float** featuring medical doctor, Rep. Paul Collins Broun, Jr. (R-GA), who says that evolution, embryology and the Big Bang Theory are "lies straight from the pit of Hell;" Arkansas Republican State Legislator John Hubbard, who believes slavery "may actually have been a blessing in disguise" for blacks; Arkansas legislative candidate Charlie Fuqua, who wants to deport all Muslims and establish the death penalty for rebellious children; Televangelist Pat Robertson, who encourages men to become Muslim and relocate to Saudi Arabia so they can legally beat their wives; and Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-SC) who believes "the more you drink, the better you're able to cope in Washington." Demand to be on this float was so great this year that participation had to be limited. Next up is the **Boy-Scout-Pedophile-Troup-Leaders-Against-Homosexuality protest float**, followed by the **Zumba Brothel Dance float** featuring Alexis Wright and her johns, the GOP sponsored **Clint Eastwood Empty Chair float**, and the Viagra sponsored **Hugh Hefner Marriage float**.

Trojan Pleasure Carts will weave through the crowd handing out 10,000 vibrating sex toys. **Ultra-Orthodox Jewish Vendors** will follow in their footsteps handing out eye glasses that blur vision so attendees won't have to look at anything they consider immodest.

The marching celebrity look-alikes will include **John Sununu** and **Lil Wayne** spewing racial slurs; former AIG CEO **Hank Greenberg** threatening to sue the government for its generosity; **Chuck Norris** ushering in 1,000 years of darkness after Obama was re-elected; wannabe senator **Geraldo Rivera** pleading "Vote for me!"; and biographer **Paula Broadwell** scoping out anyone who appears at all interested in General Petraeus. Bringing up the rear, and making his final exit, will be the **2012 King of Fools Mitt Romney**, triumphant with an overwhelming 47% of the vote from last year's parade attendees. He'll be followed by adoring throngs of self-deporting immigrants.

As the parade enters Washington Square Park, the festivities will begin. Food concessions will sell **Pink Slime, Horsemeat** and **Desinewed Meat Burgers**; there will be an **Artificial Fiscal Cliff** where patrons can line up to jump off; a booth offering **Free Amish Haircuts and Shaves**; a **Papal Confessional booth** where Pope Benedict XVI will confess to the public about predator priests, BBC presenter Jimmy Savile's Papal Knighthood, and the Vatican butler, before his sequestration and eternal silence begins; a **Demonstration of Fracking in Public Parks** will show how the government plans to use wasted open spaces to support energy independence while searching for Jimmy Hoffa's body. A **Celebrity Auction booth** will offer a virtual date with Manti Te'o and will sell the Reverend Jessie Jackson Jr's personal bling collection to help pay back squandered campaign contributions. There will be a **XXX Screening** of Hulk Hogan having sex with his friend's wife. And finally, an **Ask-a-Scientific-Genius booth** where Rep. Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) will discuss his belief that dinosaur flatulence might explain historic warming patterns; Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX), current chair of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, who describes environmentalists who warn about the seriousness of climate change "global warming alarmists"; Todd Akin, former Missouri GOP Representative, who believes "if it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down." **Volunteers will circulate waiting lists** for personal surveillance drones and semi automatic assault rifles as well as petitions to make it harder for the elderly, disabled and poor to vote. At sunset, carrying on the theme of the parade, there will be a **Ted Nugent Patriotic Fireworks Display**.

This year's parade will be televised by Al Jazeera with guest commentator former Florida Tea Party Congressman Allen West who will amaze the crowd with his talent as an anal ventriloquist. The public is encouraged to participate, in or out of costume, with or without floats, and may join the procession at any point along the parade route. Floats can be no wider than 10' and no longer than 30'. They can be self-propelled, towed, pushed or pulled. Customized bicycles, tricycles, baby carriages and aerial balloons are welcome. All participants are costumed look-alikes, and the Parade Committee assumes no liability for damages caused by satire. Parade floats and marchers must be at 59th Street and Fifth Ave no later than 11:30 a.m..

We are grateful for the generous support of Goldman Sachs which wishes to express appreciation for having gotten off scot-free after ripping off the public. Other proud sponsors include the Government Services Administration (GSA) offering free champagne and caviar throughout the park; Chick-fil-A offering free food to gay couples who refuse to patronize the anti-gay restaurant chain; Pizza Hut redeeming themselves after their misguided dare to customers to ask debating presidential candidates if they prefer sausage or pepperoni; and the international cruiseship industry hoping to entice patrons to take their new less toxic and more sanitary virtual cruises.

The King of Fools will be chosen based on the loudest cheers at Washington Square Park. The winner will reign through March 31, 2014.

Contact: Joey Skaggs . Committee Chair . 212-254-7878 . info@joeyskaggs.com . 34 E. 11th St., Suite 2A . New York, NY 10003
<http://aprilfoolsdayparade.com>

Banks got you down? Lost everything? Don't know where you're going to live?

Homelessness is a great American tragedy. Our financial system and government have let us down and we, together, must take a stand to change the way the system works. But in the meantime...

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Muppets Revenge: Outraged Homeless Muppets to Converge on Goldman Sachs

At 11:00 a.m., April 23, 2012, artist Joey Skaggs will lead a band of outraged costumed muppets down to Goldman Sachs offices at 200 West Street in NYC. Skaggs will be peddling his Mobile Homeless Homes prototype -- a low cost alternative living space for the millions of upside-down, underwater or foreclosed homeowners who have lost their houses due to the banking crisis that caused the real estate collapse.

New York, New York (PRWEB) April 21, 2012

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"Homelessness is a great American tragedy. Our financial system and government have let us down and we, together, must take a stand to change the way the system works. With over 11 million homes underwater and millions in foreclosure, people are frightened, distressed and angry," says Joey Skaggs.

Although not a cure, Mobile Homeless Homes (MHH) offers a temporary solution -- low cost alternative living spaces for the millions of upside-down, underwater or foreclosed homeowners who have lost their houses due to the banking crisis that caused the real estate collapse. The MHH centerpiece is a camouflage, stealth, mobile home made from a series of connected plastic garbage cans, propelled by a tricycle, that will be undetectable by authorities. It blends into any urban environment.

This trojan house was designed by artist Joey Skaggs. "I've created this to focus attention on the disastrous effects of government deregulation on the welfare of the general public and to underscore the fact that people are not powerless to create change; that people should not be afraid to use their First Amendment rights to denounce actions they believe are unethical and criminal," says Skaggs.

On Monday, April 23, 2012 beginning at 11:00 a.m. at 287 Spring Street (between Varick and Hudson) in New York City, Skaggs will parade his Mobile Homeless Homes prototype down to Goldman Sachs. He will be accompanied by his troupe of costumed muppets including the Fresh Juice Party band, performing their original "Mobile Homeless Blues" ballad (lyrics). They will head from Spring Street to West Street and then down West Street to Goldman Sachs at 200 West Street. Other targeted sites will be announced at a later date on the MHH website.

Goldman Sachs has been selected as the destination for the MHH debut. The muppets are there to help hold them accountable, because Goldman Sachs employees commonly have disrespectfully referred to their clients as muppets. The word muppet in British slang is a derogatory term commonly used to mean idiot or loser.

"I'm not a bank regulator. I'm not a legislator. I'm not a politician. I'm an artist. I believe it's my responsibility to do what I can to bring attention to the issues and inspire our lawmakers to make the critically necessary changes to protect the public from greed and fraud," says Joey Skaggs.

The MHH performance has been designed to be a fully legal public expression of individual rights. With the current rash of arrests of Occupy Wall Street protestors and the forcible removal of personal belongings from people sitting peacefully in parks, Skaggs says the MHH procession will be on the move at all times, except when waiting for street lights to change. And, since Mayor Bloomberg just the other day kissed Ms Piggy and announced that the Muppets (of Sesame Street fame) are now the official New York City family ambassadors, it might prove embarrassing if the police arrest Ms. Piggy as she exercises her First Amendment rights.



Mobile Homeless Homes Flyer

“ I'm not a bank regulator. I'm not a legislator. I'm not a politician. I'm an artist. I believe it's my responsibility to do what I can to bring attention to issues and inspire our lawmakers to make the critically necessary changes to protect the public. ”

Contact

Joey Skaggs
Mobile Homeless Homes
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HUFF POST

WEIRD NEWS

'Santa Claus' At United Nations: Prankster Joey Skaggs Demands Nuclear Disarmament

Posted: 11/14/2012 1:34 pm EST Updated: 11/14/2012 3:10 pm EST



Michael McLaughlin/The Huffington Post
Joey Skaggs, dressed as Santa Claus, worries that a nuclear apocalypse is a serious threat overlooked by the mainstream media.

NEW YORK -- Doesn't it seem like the holiday protest season starts earlier and earlier every year?

A protesting Santa on an adult-sized tricycle pedaled up First Avenue Tuesday, dragging an 8-foot missile to the United Nations. His message to world leaders: "Peace on Earth -- Or Else."

Nobody ran for cover. The comically fake bomb was a dud. And this St. Nick was the legendary media prankster [Joey Skaggs](#), accompanied by six performance artists serving as elves.

Given that New York suffered [the worst hurricane](#) in its history just two weeks ago, perhaps it's little surprise that this Santa and his giant toy explosive were overlooked.

Skaggs didn't care. He just wanted to kick off the holiday season with a not-so-gentle reminder about "the absurdity of nuclear Holocaust and the direction we're going with North Korea, Iran and Israel.

"Everyone wants a missile," Skaggs told The Huffington Post.

"If you don't do it now, when do you do it?," he said, "after the Holocaust?"

(Story continues below)

 [Santas Message To United Nations](#)

1 of 21 < >



Michael McLaughlin/The Huffington Post



Calling the event "Santa's Missile Tow," Skaggs and his toy-making helpers sang a rendition of Jingle Bells with lyrics like:

Jingle bells, we're going to Hell
Burning all the way
Oh what fun,
it is to die,
In a fiery nuclear way
Hey!

Compared to Skaggs' body of work as a prankster bent on exposing the media as gullible, this protest was rather sincere. He's placed ads in the Village Voice for a bogus dog brothel, attracted New York Times coverage for a non-existent movement to rename the Gypsy moth on the grounds it offended the Romany or Gypsy people. He also appeared on Good Morning America as a Marine promoting the Fat Squad -- a phony business that claimed to rent out muscle-bound guards to stop overeaters from raiding their refrigerators.

A smattering of UN employees, tourists and adults pushing strollers stopped to take photos of Santa and the chipper elves outside the United Nations' gates. But when a security guard told Skaggs his tricycle was blocking the rainswept driveway, the veteran agitator quickly pedaled to make way for traffic. On the phone before the demonstration, he told HuffPost he didn't want to get arrested.

"The message is great. Nuclear annihilation is on the back burner. Unfortunately, there aren't enough people here to get it" said Deborah Thomas, the publisher of Extra!, a magazine put out by [Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting](#). She said she's known Skaggs for years through the downtown art scene. "I think people are distracted by other things," like the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

Skaggs' reputation as a performance artist able to outflank the mainstream media enabled him to fill the ranks of his elves.

"It's an honor, even in the rain," said Sarah Farrel, 28, who met Skaggs through Rev. Jen, another longtime performance artist in New York. She was moved by the message too. "It's an important opportunity to highlight the hypocrisy of demanding disarmament of other nations, but not our own."

After about 20 minutes outside the United Nations, the anti-nuclear protestors began a slow procession west on 42nd Street towards Time Square.

Some elves handed out miniature green toy soliders to passersby. Skaggs pedaled his three-wheeler along the sidewalk and the group occasionally burst into the altered version of Jingle Bells. They stopped to dance with a man collecting donations for the Salvation Army while shimmying exuberantly to Mariah Carey's "All I Want For Christmas Is You" playing from his radio.

It didn't quite hark back to the anti-nuclear movement in 1982 when one million demonstrators amassed for a protest in New York City, but Skaggs was pleased with the "Missile Tow."

"It's a different era," Skaggs said about the turnout. "But the reaction is great. You can see it, people are taking pictures."

-

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Nation: **Hoaxes**

If the Media Are Clueless, How Bright Is the Public?

By John Elvin

Hoaxster Joey Skaggs calls them 'performance art'; editors call them pranks. Whatever they are termed, Skaggs' little tricks have earned high marks on the scoreboard of irony for unstuffing media shirts.

Fish condos. Just imagine you're a harried, hassled editor at a fast-paced major newspaper or television network and a story comes across your desk about some guy who's marketing "fish condos — housing for upwardly mobile guppies." In the nanosecond you devote to such a deci-

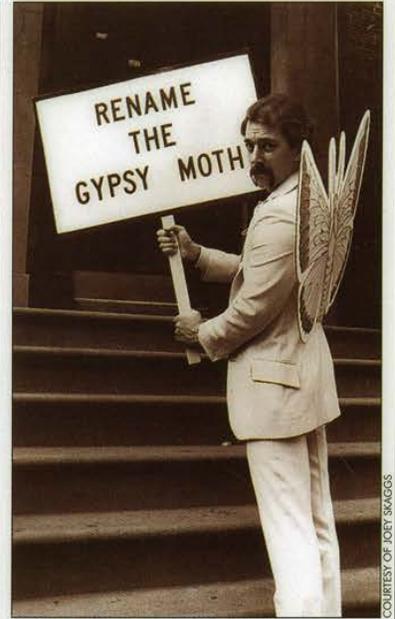
sion, you decide it's cute, it's clever, it's human interest ... let's do it.

Joey Skaggs has "gotcha!"

Skaggs, the acknowledged master of exposing media gullibility, is a self-described "social-political satirist." Conned reporters and editors term him, often acerbically, a "prankster."



True confessional? Skaggs pedals his brand of religion to the believing masses.



Jo-Jo the Gypsy wondered about the political correctness of a bug name.

He frequently finds himself the target of reporters' mockery and put-downs because he confronts them with an ugly fact: News today is more sensation than information, and feeding the readers the next quick fix has replaced old-fashioned dicta of the news trade such as "Check it out."

Skaggs, who hardly worked up a sweat getting serious media attention when he announced the "cockroach hormone cure" as a panacea for killer diseases, can take the heat. He says it's the price he pays for fabricating "totally plausible concepts that are then made real by the news media." The cockroach concoction, complete with a fancy-looking medical laboratory and press-conference testimonials from cured "patients," was Skaggs' protest of the press' unquestioning acceptance of so-called wonder cures. "People say they have a cure for cancer, for AIDS ... 'just give us your money.'" He says these stories often result in further emotional pain and financial ruin for desperate victims "whose lives are at stake. The media's helping to exploit them."

From Skaggs' perspective, which he steadfastly believes reflects the greater reality shared by all, the media are conduits for any baloney that catches their fancy or serves their purposes. Those purposes may be ideological or commercial — reporters and editors, he believes, tout their objectivity while tailoring the news to suit their own comfort zones. "They

act as a conduit for people with all kinds of different agendas who want to sell you goods, services, philosophies," Skaggs tells *Insight*. "You get a lot of propaganda, misinformation, disinformation, hype, hypocrisy, sales pitches, conflict of interest."

To prove his point, Skaggs has duped a vast number of reporters, talk-show hosts and even the game show *To Tell the Truth* — in the latter instance by successfully sending an imposter to confess the pranks Skaggs has played. So let the reader beware; any quotes herein technically should be attributed to "a person purporting to be Joey Skaggs, reached at his apartment war room in New York City."

Just as mystery writers know they can drop large clues that readers will overlook in their rush toward a "solution," Skaggs is confident he can return at will to the scene of the crime — the media spotlight, in this case — and, even using his real name, address and telephone number, perpetuate another captivating hoax that will be bought lock, stock and barrel. It is not a challenge to be ignored, as he has demonstrated time and again. "None of my hoaxes have failed," Skaggs declares. In his analysis, that's because his audience — the media and those who follow them hypnotically — doesn't retain information. Friends assure him he won't be able to perpetrate a follow-up hoax, to which his response is: "Watch."

Among his many successes:

- "Port-o-fess," a mobile confessional booth attached to a bicycle pedaled by "the Rev. Anthony Joseph." In this widely accepted guise, Skaggs patrolled the streets outside the 1992 Democratic National Convention in New York for the benefit of the press and delegates who otherwise wouldn't have time to make confession: "Religion on the go for people on the move!" was his motto.

- Hair Today Ltd. was accorded a substantial amount of airtime and ink as a firm specializing in the cure of baldness through hair transplants from cadavers.

- Baba Wa Simba was welcomed into the media limelight as a New Age guru who could cure "the wounded animal in all of us." Baba Wa found an especially appreciative audience in Europe, Skaggs notes, because of the appetite for "wacky American stories."

- The Celebrity Sperm Bank, where the sperm of famous rock stars was available at auction. Skaggs drew a mob of fans, police and press to the bank's spurious headquarters by announcing that it had been robbed.

- The Bad Guy Talent Agency, a bogus agency specializing in providing the entertainment world with especially vile characters. This stunt backfired when the agency became an overnight commercial success, attracting attention from potential "talent" as well as the entertainment industry.

- The Cathouse for Dogs — an agency that auctioned services of its canine coterie to owners of sexually deprived pooches. This scam so outraged public officials that Skaggs had to depose under oath that it was a hoax.

- Jo-Jo the Gypsy, who found an eager media audience for his protest focused on the political incorrectness of the term "gypsy moth."

Sometimes Skaggs works alone at his stunts, conducting mass mailings, monitoring news accounts as they progress from the sublime to the ridiculous. In other instances, he recruits a band of accomplices — actors, technical assistants and a camera crew — for assistance and to add credibility to the project.

The presence of a camera crew, pos-



Snausages! Dog-meat prank outraged.

ing as news representatives of a television station, buoyed acceptance of Skaggs' role as Dr. Joseph Bonuso, a research scientist who had developed a way to determine the proper outcome of court cases by using the "Solomon" computer program. This scam capitalized on the media frenzy surrounding the first O.J. Simpson trial. At its peak, the hoax involved some 25 grim-faced actors pumping data into computer terminals as CNN cameras recorded the performance. With its voracious, round-the-clock news appetite, the cable network repeatedly has fallen for Skaggs' tricks; a forthcoming documentary illustrates half a

dozen of his appearances in different roles. "It gets pretty frightening when you see it in retrospect," he notes.

For his "Solomon" computer hoax, as cameras rolled and reporters queried, "Professor Bonuso" explained that he could establish guilt in criminal and civil cases through a revolutionary new process involving neutral computer analysis of the facts in the case, coupled with voice-stress and lie-detector assessment of testimony by all witnesses, attorneys and judges involved. As the media lapped it up, "Bonuso" announced that "Solomon" had arrived at various verdicts: O.J. Simpson, guilty. Mike Tyson, not guilty. William Kennedy Smith, guilty. The Menendez brothers, guilty. Klaus von Bulow, guilty. The officers in the Rodney King case, guilty.

Amusing, maybe, but what, exactly, was the point? Simply to give the press another hotfoot? Skaggs says he was protesting "the fact that criminal and civil-court cases are played out before our very eyes as though they are sporting matches. The truth no longer provides the key to justice."

Among dozens of other pranks, probably one of the most successful and outrageous was the Dog Meat Soup Co. Posing as a South Korean entrepreneur, Skaggs wrote letters to 1,500 animal shelters across the country offering to buy stray dogs at 10 cents per pound. Skaggs believed the American public, with its own prejudices regarding what animals may be consumed, would go bonkers when confronted with the dog-meat proposal — and he was right on target. Animal-rights groups and public officials took the story completely out of his hands — in the process, he believes, exposing their own racism and cultural bigotry.

One of the messages of the prank, Skaggs maintains, was that "we are culturally intolerant. It was about prejudice," he says, "as illustrated in the letters, faxes and calls I received."

Those who fell for the hoax generally were not too forthcoming about admitting their gullibility. "The media were totally irresponsible in their approach," Skaggs says. "They never once actually verified that this existed." He never took calls; the "Dog Meat" phone line was answered by a taped message — and yet, he says, stories appeared in which reporters and officials claimed to have spoken to company representatives. "They said they spoke to Koreans. They never spoke to anyone. I have tapes of all the phone calls. All they got was our outgoing message."

As often is the case, Skaggs' new-fangled morality play went slightly

awry. Editorialists criticized him for endangering the lives of Asian Americans by perpetuating a stereotype that their neighbors might react to with suspicion and possibly violence. Some reporters implied, wink-wink, they knew it all along. Others simply refused to admit they'd been had.

If there is one point to which Skaggs returns time and again, it is insisting that his efforts are an art form. His work spans 30 years, growing out of protests he developed as a Greenwich Village

antiwar demonstrator. A teacher and lecturer, Skaggs has been an instructor of media communications at New York's School of Visual Arts and Parson's The New School. "There are all kinds of people doing all kinds of pranks," Skaggs says. "I really draw a line

between what I do and what others do. There is a huge difference. I really consider it my art; I use theater; I use public-relations and advertising techniques to create an illusion." Skaggs also frequently makes the point that "I never break the law and I never take money" in the course of the hoaxes.

"I let the media go with it; I judge success by how many people I'm able to reach with the message." And the message? "Question authority in all its shapes and forms. Don't suspend critical thinking for wishful thinking," Skaggs says. He sees his role as that of the archetypal trickster, a character found in the literature and mythology of most cultures whose role is to jar his fellows out of the workaday rut of their routines, such as accepting "news" as gospel. He speaks seriously about his "pranks," describing their function, at best, as to raise the consciousness of those — most people, apparently — who are "sleepwalking on automatic pilot."

Skaggs makes the point that if he can con the media as one lone activist with a fax machine, perhaps readers and viewers can learn to be a bit skeptical of news orchestrated by vast government, political and business empires.

To Skaggs, the ultimate stage in a prank is when it is exposed — when he finally confronts the media and confesses. He tries to choose the moment, like an artist adding the final touch to a canvas. The revelation often receives the least attention from the press

corps, because his victims don't want to deal with issues of "ethics and responsibility and the potential for the media to misuse power," he says.

So this man with a sense of humor is as much philosopher as prankster. But it is difficult to tell where the absurdity ends and life begins. As if to prove that life imitates art, particularly when the media help in the project, Skaggs has seen one of his pet projects become a consumer reality. Initially his "fish condo" was a satire on the yuppie-gentrification phenomenon, a protest against the destruction of affordable, diverse neighborhood housing to create expensive condos for the better-off.

It's apparently a crusade that Skaggs took quite personally because such homogenization, he says, "has a tendency to force the creative people, the artists, out of neighborhoods. The artists tend to be the pioneers, going into neighborhoods that nobody else goes into, and then the community becomes hip, and then the doctors and lawyers and dentists and accountants take over. The prices go up, the rents go up."

In protest, he created housing for "upwardly mobile guppies."

"It was a joke," he muses. "Condos for fish? Give me a break. It's about people getting evicted. But people miss the satire. It's a joke with tremendous com-

mercial appeal." So fish condos became a mail-order product — for \$5,000 a pop, "Fish not included" — through the exclusive Neiman Marcus "1996 Christmas Book" catalog. There are four different units, sold individually. There's a guppy-sized living room, a cozy little kitchen, a parlor and a bedroom, all appointed with furniture, fixtures and even decorations — including framed portraits of cats.

Skaggs says he's honored to have been included in the luxury department-store chain's exclusive compendium of consumer fantasies, a glittering 100-page collection of Steuben glass, Calvin Klein clothing, diamonds, pearls, gourmet mail-order steaks, caviar and other delicacies and adult toys ranging from \$35,000 to \$50,000. There's even an incredibly customized Airstream trailer priced at \$195,000. "To be able to do my art and make sociopolitical satirical statements is great, but it doesn't earn a living," Skaggs says. The fish tanks actually are selling — "To me, it's a great irony."

Well, it is kind of magical, isn't it? Struggling artist protesting against the evils of modern civilization, and he comes up with a concept that catches on, that pays the freight, that gets him in the Neiman Marcus catalog. The catalog entry is fairly straightforward, emphasizing the high-play aspects of the product but making no reference to the underlying subversiveness that inspired Skaggs to create it.

Ironic, indeed. Taking an idea and turning it into money; it's the American Dream. It's opportunistic capitalism. It's ... it's what Skaggs has been fighting all these years.

That observation isn't lost on the trickster. "I'm competing with reality," he observes, "and it's getting harder and harder. Life is getting more and more bizarre. The hoaxes have to get bigger and better."

Wait a minute ... bigger? ... better? So we should be on the alert? "Always," Skaggs assures us.

So we dial the toll-free number. "Neiman Marcus, this is Catherine. How may I help you?"

It's a pleasant-sounding voice with a gentle Dallas twang.

"I'm a reporter for *Insight* magazine. I want to verify that you take orders for item #135, the fish condo?"

Not a moment's hesitation: "Oh, yes, sir, we surely do."

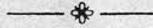
Hmmm. Well, okay, Joey. If this is another of your scams, it's so good you deserve to get away with it a while longer. ●



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KIM YUNG SOO, *President*

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Dear Executive Director,

Excuse my English Please, Thank You. First congratulation on all your good work with animal. We support. We would like to help your company make money, so we like to offer help so you make money. Dog shelter kill million of dog, cost money. Dog shelter cremate dog cost money. Dog shelter need money to operate. Where it get money? Hard to get money.

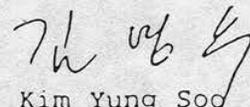
Many people like to eat dog. People need to eat dog. Where do they get dog? Some people they raise dog to eat. Some steal dog, make some people angry, hurt some people. That not right.

We like make proposal to your dog shelter to sell us dog. You save money, you make money. We buy all dog, regardless of size or color. We prefer big, young, strong dog but we take all dog from your dog shelter. We cook dog in America. We can dog in America and sell some dog in America in Asian market place. Lot people in America eat dog. Most dog we ship oversea. Lot people eat dog. Many country eat dog. Korea, China eat dog, Philippines, Japan, Thailand, Cambodia eat dog. Dog is healthy for you. This way your cost of business is less. You make more money, more people happy. You get cleaner air. No burn up dog. No waste dog. People pet no disappear. Everybody happy.

Cause we understand some people no like idea to eat dog. But they make trouble for people who like eat dog. Those people called two face. Those people eat cow, rabbit and mice, squirrel and frog and every thing else, but still give us trouble. But dog is good food. Dog is good medicine, make sick people strong, make old people young, make penis hard, make sex good again. Our business getting very big. Need more dog. We are prepared to offer you 10¢ per pound per dog. We pick up dog every day, so you also save on feeding dog. We like very much to speak with you and make deal. Please tell us how many dog available in your business. We have deal already to do same with dog shelter in New Jersey, Connecticut and Massachusetts. We hope to be eventually in big city cross America. You can join us now, save money and continue doing your good job. We do big business together. We have big business already with many dog breeder and many dog hospital. Dog no suffer, We have quick death for dog.

Looking to hear from you soon,

Thank you


Kim Yung Soo
President

SUNDAY, JULY 17, 1994

JOHN

TIERNEY

The Big City

FALLING FOR IT

Joey Skaggs has offered me a rare chance to chronicle the creation of his art, which is why I am watching him stand in line at the Chinatown post office. He is mailing 1,500 letters proposing to buy stray dogs for the purpose of turning them into delicious canned food.

Each of these letters to dog shelters across America bears the logo of a nonexistent Korean company, Kea So Joo, which means Dog Meat Soup. The company offers 10 cents a pound for dogs that will be cooked and canned for sale to Asians fond of this traditional dish. "Dog is good food," the letter explains. "Dog is good medicine. Our business getting very big. Need more dog." It offers free pickup and a promise: "Dog no suffer. We have quick death for dog."

This is the first stage of a genre that Skaggs has been developing since the 1960s. Now 48, he began as a conventional artist in Greenwich Village: painter, sculptor, organizer of political protests. He carried a cross up Fifth Avenue on Easter, built a Vietnamese nativity scene in Central Park and gradually got annoyed at the way the press covered him. Like everyone else in America, he resented having the world explained by journalists in midtown Manhattan. He realized that many of New York's media know-it-alls are just moderately educated folks churning out information obtained from press releases and from phone conversations with strangers. They're paid to sit in windowless rooms and pretend they can see the political situation in Prague or the best place to rock-climb in Arizona. Skaggs saw an opportunity for what he calls conceptual performance art or media pieces. He has staged dozens of media hoaxes that have fooled hundreds of newspapers and television shows, ranging from network news programs to "Geraldo."

He was interviewed on ABC's "Good Morning America" as Joe Bones, the head of the Fat Squad, a group of commandos who would move in with you and physically restrain you from eating. He made The New York Times as Jo-Jo, a gypsy leading a protest against the term "gypsy moth." He has



A man claiming to be Joey Skaggs, wearing a dog mask.

been a psychic attorney, a doctor who treats baldness by transplanting scalps from cadavers and the proprietor of a canine brothel for sexually deprived pets — the Cathouse for Dogs. When he was invited to be a guest on "To Tell The Truth," he sent a friend to appear in his place and stand up at the end, claiming to be the real Joey Skaggs. It hasn't been a lucrative career, but Skaggs says that he manages to support a bohemian standard of living by giving lectures on his hoaxes, teaching (this fall he's offering "Culture Jamming and Media Activism" at the School of Visual Arts), consulting and selling paintings and sculptures.

FOR THIS PROJECT HE HAS SET UP A phone line and recorded an announcement in both Korean and English, complete with barking dogs in the background. The recipients of the letters are quick to respond. Two days after the letters are sent out, the line is swamped as Skaggs logs thousands of calls and taped messages from animal-welfare officials, the police, reporters and various appalled cow-eating Americans. Some animal lovers call him a filthy yellow devil and suggest Asians be deported, killed or canned. Dozens of newspapers and television stations carry staff-written and wire-service articles reporting investigations by concerned officials at animal-welfare groups. One article notes a possible link between the letter and the disappearance of large dogs in upstate New York; another quotes an official on Long Island as claiming "proof" that the letter is from a real company. On WWOR-TV in New York, the "Dogs for Food?" story leads the 10 o'clock evening news, introduced by frenetic music, a giant "EXCLUSIVE" banner scrolling across the screen and shots of lovable dogs barking in a kennel as a stern, reportorial voice announces: "They are companions, they are protectors, they are pets, but they are never dinner. In this country the idea of eating dog is not only illegal, it's repulsive."

Skaggs monitors it all from his apartment near Washington Square, refusing to answer the phone or

return any calls from reporters. At first this strikes me as a disappointingly passive role for a performance artist with his record, a man whose home is cluttered with thousands of clips and tapes featuring him out there actively duping the media. One wall is dominated by the Portofess, an eight-foot-high confessional booth that he mounted behind a tricycle ("Religion on the Move for People on the Go!"), pedaled to the Democratic Convention in 1992 and demonstrated for CBS and assorted newspapers (USA Today, The Daily News, The Philadelphia Inquirer) while posing as a California priest.

Now Skaggs won't even do a telephone interview. Has he lost his touch?

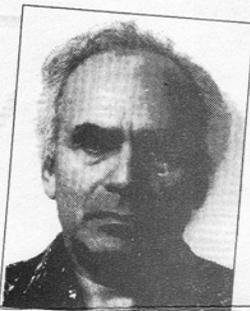
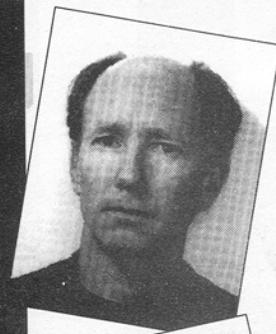
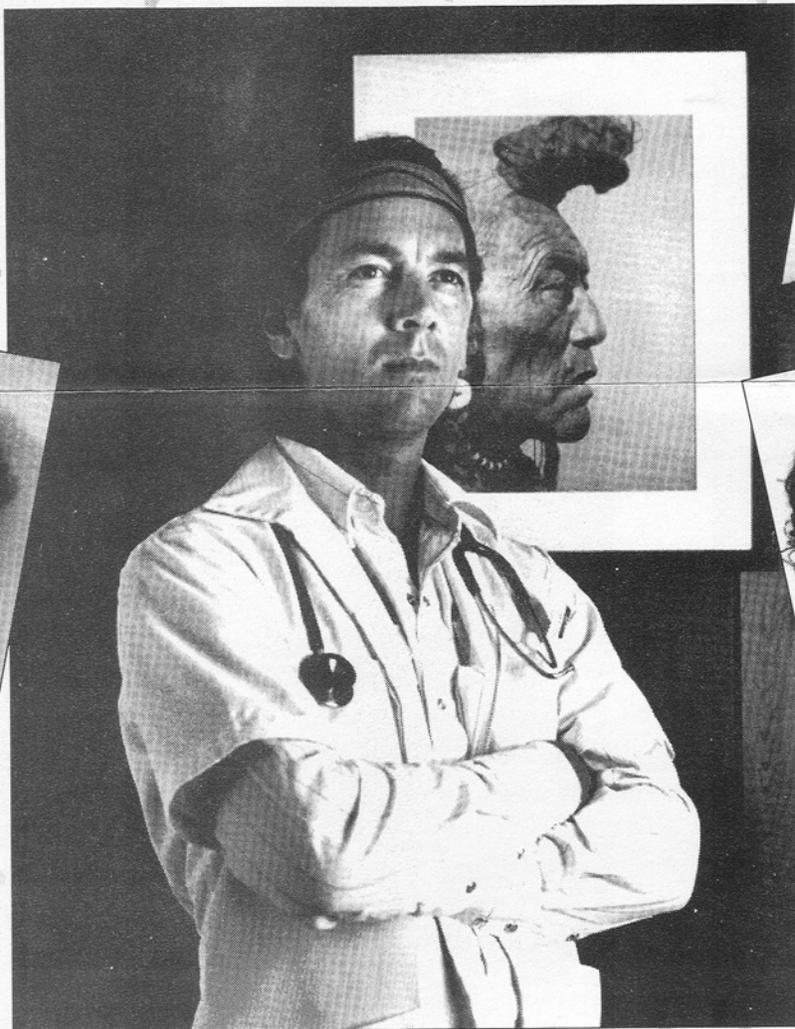
But then I begin to appreciate a new level of maturity in his work. What's wonderful about this media hoax is that he doesn't even have to deal with the media. The animal-welfare advocates handle all the publicity for him. His pidgin letter is comically absurd, but they can't pass up such a splendid opportunity for outrage. Like leaders of other special-interest groups, they're delighted at any chance to get attention and rally the troops for a crisis, even an imaginary crisis. And the reporters are glad to go along, even if they suspect it's a hoax, because they can cover an imaginary crisis without violating the conventions of journalism. They can be completely accurate in reporting on the outrage. As long as someone is complaining about something interesting, it's too good a story to pass up.

"These special-interest groups are screamers, and the media listen to screamers," Skaggs says. "These groups have the resources to do a better con job on the media than I can. They're the great performance artists."

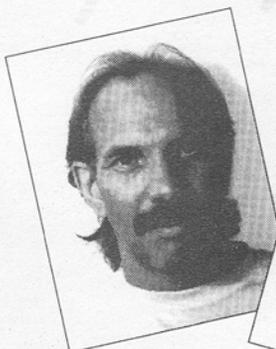
After the crisis has been in the news for a week, Skaggs completes his work of art by sending a release headlined, "Dog Meat Hoax Exposed." He confesses his role and explains that his purpose has been "to bring to light issues of cultural bias, intolerance and racism," as well as to demonstrate the media's tendency to be "reactionary, gullible and irresponsible."

I'd like to join him in those sentiments, but it's a little hard to condemn the media's gullibility now that I've dutifully reported what a professional liar has told me. I've tried not to get hoaxed by Skaggs: I demanded to see his driver's license; I secretly lifted one of his letters so I could see what he was mailing; I confirmed the identity of people who left messages on his machine. But I still realize that he might be duping me somehow. I'm still willing to give him publicity for his crusade against media manipulation. As long as he's complaining about something interesting, it's too good a story to pass up. ■

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Native American Surgeon Dr. Joseph Chenango, Founder of Hair Today, Ltd., and some of his many satisfied clients before and after transplants.



THE VILLAGE

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ON THE **MOVE**

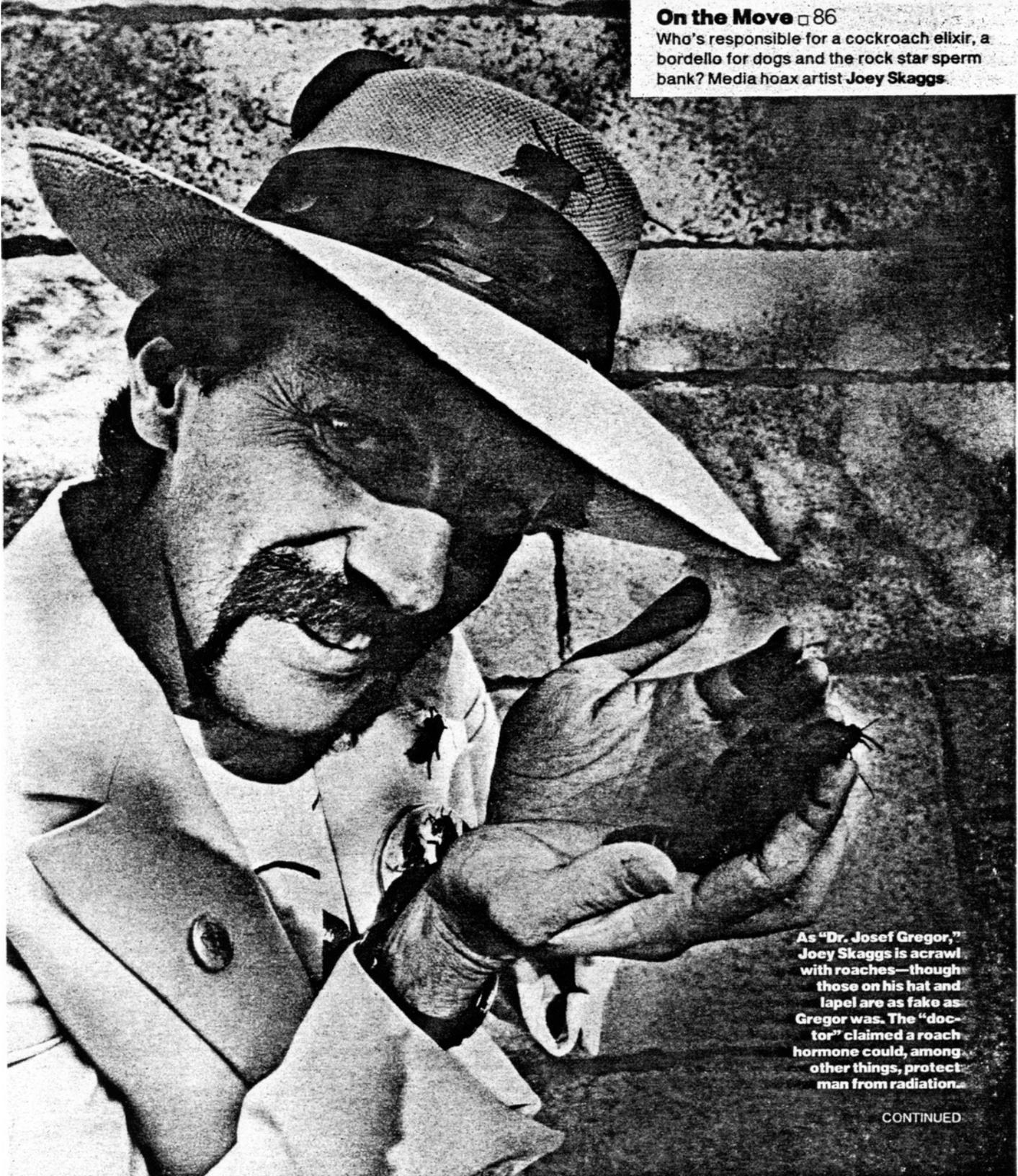
**A GREENWICH VILLAGE
HOAXER BUGS THE MEDIA
WITH TALES OF MEDICINE
MADE FROM COCKROACHES**

People

weekly

On the Move □ 86

Who's responsible for a cockroach elixir, a bordello for dogs and the rock star sperm bank? Media hoax artist **Joey Skaggs**.



As "Dr. Josef Gregor," Joey Skaggs is acrawl with roaches—though those on his hat and lapel are as fake as Gregor was. The "doctor" claimed a roach hormone could, among other things, protect man from radiation.

CONTINUED

MARK SENNET/DOUGSIE



KASSO WILDER

ON THE MOVE

'I use the media as a painter would use canvas,' says Skaggs

Last May, Dr. Josef Gregor invited the press to his Manhattan office to announce an astounding medical breakthrough: Cockroach hormones had been found to cure a variety of common human ailments, including the flu and menstrual cramps. The sign on his office door read "Metamorphosis," a reference to the organization sponsoring Gregor's research, and while Gregor read his statement, 70 Metamorphosis followers studied his exhibits—including a fiberglass cockroach bigger than a cocker spaniel.

Among the reporters present was UPI's Ed Lion, 24, and the story he wrote on Gregor ran in more than 175 of the wire service's client papers. After the press conference, Gregor appeared on *Live at Five*, an early-evening WNBC-TV newscast in New York. Radio interviews followed.

What almost nobody in the media seemed to remember was Franz Kafka's story *The Metamorphosis*, about a man named Gregor Samsa who turns into an insect. Within two months the "Dr. Gregor" phenomenon was revealed as a hoax perpetrated by a Greenwich Village artist and college instructor, Joey Skaggs, 35. The Metamorphosis followers at the press conference were actor friends. "None

of it was true," Skaggs says. "I use the media as a medium, as a painter would use canvas. Everything I do is a social political commentary. Dr. Gregor was a satire on people who look to cults for a panacea. My purpose is to make reporters more responsible."

UPI's Lion found little redeeming social value in the hoax. "I wrote it up as a cult group because they were acting like Moonies," he says. "I guess I got suckered in." *Live at Five* co-anchor Sue Simmons admits: "It's a classic example of how easily we can be duped. We realized before air time it was probably a hoax, but we put Gregor on anyway—more for entertainment than anything else." *Live at Five* co-producer Fred Farrar decided not to interview Skaggs again because "we didn't want to do more to promote his put-on." UPI did run a follow-up story in which managing editor Don Reed conceded, "We were hoodwinked."

Skaggs says he spent more than \$3,000 of his own money on his roach spoof, but he financed two 1979 "media performances" with a \$3,500 grant funded by New York State. In one he played a tuxedoed bootblack who charged \$5 a shine—as a comment on "conspicuous consumer consumption." In the other he staged a protest march against loud portable radios.

Skaggs first gained notoriety in 1966 when he was fined \$1 for violating New York park regulations by carrying a 10-foot crucifix, with an American In-

Between scams, Skaggs ponders one of his abstract "imaginary landscapes." Two are at Manhattan's Hal Bromm Gallery.

dian skull and a metal penis attached, in the city's Easter parade. The point, he says, was to "protest man's inhumanity to man." In 1969, to deride breast fixations, Skaggs hung a 50-foot bra on Wall Street. In 1976 he advertised a "cathouse for dogs" with "Hot Bitches—from pedigree (Fifi the French Poodle) to mutts (Lady the Tramp)." New York's WABC-TV bit, citing him in a series on dog abuse. The next year Skaggs posed as Giuseppe Scaggoll, founder of the Celebrity Sperm Bank, specializing in rock-star semen. It was written up in *Ms*.

Son of an auto repairman in New York, Skaggs studied at Manhattan's High School of Art and Design. He now teaches media communications at the School of Visual Arts, using students in his "performances." The school's president, David Rhodes, approves. "They take his course to learn how the media operate," he says.

Skaggs won't discuss his next hoax but says recent publicity won't blow his cover. "People will forget Dr. Gregor tomorrow," Skaggs contends. Meanwhile he paints, writes scripts and copes with his reputation. "People always expect me to lie," he laments. "I also have this recurring nightmare that two guys dressed in Raid cans are going to come with straitjackets and carry me away." **REBECCA BRICKER**

Power Struggles Environmental Group, In Change of Strategy, Is Stressing Economics

Defense Fund Says Utilities Can Fill Needs and Save By Forgoing Big Plants Are Its Estimates Reliable?

By JOHN R. ENOSWILLAS Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal BERKELEY, Calif.—David Roe is an environmentalist with some novel ideas about how to fix his trade...

Dollars for Small Darters

The EDF is in the vanguard of a major shift in the national debate over energy and the environment. Environmental activists around the country are just as opposed to big new energy projects as they ever were...

Aluminum Industry Slump Is Worsening, as Auto, Appliance, Building and Construction Industries Cut Output

The aluminum industry slump is worsening, as auto, appliance, building and construction industries cut output. Aluminum makers will slash operating rates, currently below 90% of capacity...

Avco Corp. Names General Foods Executive Robert P. Bauman to Succeed James R. Kerr as Chairman and Chief Executive

Avco Corp. names General Foods executive Robert P. Bauman to succeed James R. Kerr as chairman and chief executive. Avco predicted its earnings will fall 30% from 1980 levels...

Conservation and the Sun

One receptive audience—up to a point—is the utility industry. Sky-high interest rates and zoning construction costs have left many utilities unable to afford big new power plants...

The IMF Would Tighten Lending Policies and Restrict Expansion of Its Lending Capacity

The IMF would tighten lending policies and restrict expansion of its lending capacity, in accordance with pressure from the U.S. and other industrial nations.

The Ex-Im Bank Approved an \$800.5 Million Loan to Air Canada at 8.7% Interest for the Purchase of 15 Boeing B767 Jets

The Ex-Im Bank approved an \$800.5 million loan to Air Canada at 8.7% interest for the purchase of 15 Boeing B767 jets.

The Los Angeles Times Plans to Contest 1980 FTC Price-Discrimination Charges and the Resultant Tentative Settlement

The Los Angeles Times plans to contest 1980 FTC price-discrimination charges and the resultant tentative settlement. The agreement was negotiated under "distinctly different regulatory and marketplace conditions"...

What It Does

The EDF's headquarters are in New York, but most of its energy work is carried out in its modest second-floor office suite on the grounds of a seminary here in this one-time playground for rabbis, preachers and political cartoons share space with statistical reports on utilities...

Markets

Stocks: Volume 248,000 shares. Dow Jones industrials 834.90, up 11.33; transportation 255.18, off 3.24; utilities 182.11, off 1.80.

TODAY'S INDEX

Table with 2 columns: Index Name and Value. Includes Annual Meeting Results, Composite, Profit Margins, etc.

Please Turn to Page 22, Column 1

What's News Business and Finance World-Wide

CONGRESS won't be pressured into accepting Reagan's latest budget-cutting proposals, legislators say. House Republican Whip Trent Lott referred to the forthcoming reaction to trim \$16 billion from fiscal 1982's deficit as "trench warfare"...

Tax law changes designed to generate \$3 billion in federal revenue also are likely to meet a fight, congressional and corporate tax experts say. Most vulnerable to defeat, they agree, are requests for accelerating tax collection on profits from multityear contracts...

The Big Board will draw attention as investment makers brace for another week of crisis. Last week produced a 16-month low in the Dow Jones industrial average and a heavy level of margin calls...

Machine tool orders totaled \$214 million in August, up 10% from July's depressed level but down 4.7% from the year earlier. Sluggish orders, attributed to high interest rates and economic uncertainty, are seen continuing through 1982's first quarter.

The aluminum industry slump is worsening, as auto, appliance, building and construction industries cut output. Aluminum makers will slash operating rates, currently below 90% of capacity...

Iran recaptured Abadan, inflicting 400 casualties on Iraq in battles for the oil-refining city. Tehran Radio declared. The state radio said 2,000 other Iraqi troops were captured and construction industries cut output...

Mexico's ruling party nominated a protégé of President Jose Lopez Portillo to succeed him in elections July 1. The announcement raised hopes of speculation that the government's centrist economic and social policies will continue.

Canada's Supreme Court is to rule today on constitutional changes proposed by Prime Minister Trudeau. The changes, which would remove the document from British jurisdiction, set up a formula for its amendment and establish a bill of rights...

Britain's Labor Party narrowly rejected moderate Denis Healey as deputy leader over left-wing Tony Benn. The battle ended with Healey as deputy leader. Moderate members had feared a Ben victory would cause further defections to the new centrist Social Democratic Party.

Belgium's king will be told he should order parliament dissolved and call new elections. Willy Claes, Deputy premier of the center-left coalition that recently quit over a dispute on aid to Belgium's sagging steel industry, said the king should order new elections as the only way to break the deadlock with French-speaking Socialists.

Passengers' outraged hijackers aboard a Yugoslav jetliner in Larnaca, Cyprus, by staging a false fire alarm. Three Croatians armed with a pistol and knife took over the craft after it left Dubrovnik, but 11 hours later were left without their 307 hostages if fire passengers and crew shouted "Fire, Fire" and rumbled out emergency exits.

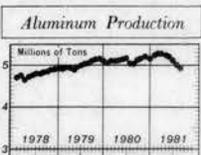
Israel's cabinet condemned "the arbitrary and immoral" decision by the International Atomic Energy Agency to suspend technical aid to Israel. The IAEA voted 518, with 27 abstentions, in Vienna Saturday, in response to Israel's bombing of an Iraqi nuclear reactor June 7.

Interim government financing will be guaranteed for the bridge today. The financing plan for the period between the start of the 1982 fiscal year Thursday and the passage of budget appropriations delayed by Reagan's veto, said the Senate approved on Friday the so-called continuing resolution, and differences between it and a House-passed measure must be resolved by Thursday.

Democrats gathered in Des Moines were told by the party's vice chairman, Lynn Coon, that "reports of the demise of the Democratic Party are greatly exaggerated. Some 230 Democrats seeking to become candidates received tips on how to beat the newly elected GOP, while other party members discussed changing rules on nominating presidential candidates.

Transit officials agreed that Reagan's proposed 12% cut in aid would reduce average and raise its cost. Philadelphia, which would lose \$5.2 million in U.S. subsidies said it would be forced to hold a fare increase bearing if the cut became law. The head of the Urban Mass Transportation Authority said he would urge a 5% reduction in operating subsidies.

Dieb: Robert Montgomery, 77, a film director and television producer, in New York of cancer.



ALUMINUM PRODUCTION IN THE U.S. fell to an annual rate of 4,906,300 tons in August, down from 5,000,000 tons in July, the Aluminum Association reports.

A Kafkaesque Tale Of Health Faddists Eating Cockroaches

And Journalists Eating Crow. As the Story Turns Out To Be a Teacher's Hoax

By DAVID J. BLUM Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal NEW YORK—As Joseph Skaggs awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed into a gigantic media event...

The Chicago Tribune, May 28, 1981: "A New York group called Metamorphosis led by one Josef Gregor, 40, who has a Ph.D. from an unnamed South American university, is mauling Chicago's red 'cockroach' pills. The 70 members believe that those interesting creatures make the cockroach impervious to man's assaults will get them past the nagging everyday pain of acne, asthma, and yes, the misery of nuclear fallout..."

Josef Gregor... Metamorphosis... the cockroach story was a hoax, perpetrated by Joseph Skaggs, a teacher of journalism at New York's School of Visual Arts with a fondness for Franz Kafka and strong opinions about the quality of the press...

He gazed no one reads Kafka anymore," laments Mr. Skaggs, who believes that the American news media will fail for just about any reason he can think of.

Certainly, a sizable number of the nation's editors miss his blatant jokes. "I wish I could see the inside of their heads," says Gregor. "I wish I could see the inside of their heads..."

Mr. Skaggs has told the media depend on people believing what they say," says Mr. Skaggs, a 35-year-old teacher in New York. "Law & Order. Wearing his costume, he told the TV audience about the miracle roach cure, Fred Farrar, who shows a co-producer, says, 'I know it wasn't for my health. We must do it because it was for winning a lot.' But he admits that the show's hosts have yet to inform viewers of the hoax on the air."

Newspapers from the Bend (Ore.) Bulletin to the Louisville Courier-Journal published versions of the story after it appeared on the wire. Most were accompanied by a UPI photo showing "Dr. Gregor" holding up a dish containing a "soper magic," according to most captions.

Donald Reed of UPI insists that the story was carefully checked before it went out on the wire. He looked into his references and educational background," he says. But Mr. Skaggs says he only provided fictitious references to those who asked. The UPI reporter, Mr. Lee, is vacillating. "Mr. Reed says 'he doesn't have any comment.'"

Many editors object to the wire service's handling of the incident. "They should have sent out a correction," says Denis Horgan, a columnist for the now-defunct Washington Star, who wrote a piece based on the original wire story that was published in his paper. "When something's wrong, the reader has a right to know about it," he says. "No matter how minor a story might be, it's spinning news."

Mr. Reed of UPI says that even though the wire service's handling of the incident was already rejected.

But the administration is betting that it has Congress behind it on a career. The Reagan tax cuts—totaling \$28 billion by fiscal year 1984 and \$75 billion by fiscal year 1986—leave Congress little choice but to cut the budget to ensure large federal deficits at a time when deficits are blamed for keeping interest rates high. Budget Director Stockman calls the tax cuts "sharp in government" because they sharply curtail the cushion of rising revenues to finance new federal programs and they force Congress to pay close attention to the deficit consequences of every spending bill.

The administration insisted on congressional approval of a three-year, 20% increase in personal income-tax rates plus a sharp acceleration of depreciation write-offs for new business investment in order to provide predictable, long-term incentives for increased saving and investment—the keystone of the Reagan program for economic recovery.

But the tax cuts also play a crucial role in advancing the Reagan philosophy of less government interference in the economy. Although many business and congressional leaders thought the administration should reduce spending and balance the budget before reducing taxes, the administration saw enactment of its tax-cut proposals as the fastest way to force cuts in federal spending and shrinkage of big government.

As Mr. Reagan made clear last week, the tax cuts force the entire government to accept the administration's motto — "Don't stand there, undo something" — a federal regulation, a tax or a government spending program.

This "can undo" attitude reflects the administration's conviction that the government's role is not to remove impediments to economic growth and let the marketplace run itself with the assurance that the government won't change economic policy in response to short-term economic difficulties.

"This fundamental premise is widely and deeply shared by all of us who are involved daily in economic policymaking, beginning with Ronald Reagan," Mr. Reagan says. "We start each day with a firm and common philosophical framework about the proper relationship of government and the economy."

During the weeks leading up to President Reagan's announcement of his latest package of budget cuts last week, the administration sometimes appeared to be in disarray. The President flip-flopped on whether to raise money by delaying cost-of-living increases for Social Security recipients. His Secretary of Defense and his Budget Director squabbled over arms spending levels. As it turned out, Mr. Reagan retreated slightly on several fronts. Despite the new proposal for \$16 billion in spending cuts and \$10 billion in tax increases for fiscal year 1982, which starts Thursday, Mr. Reagan won't quit meet his earlier goal of holding the deficit to \$23.5 billion. He decided to slow down his defense buildup. And he reluctantly sided with Budget Director David Stockman's desire for certain tax changes to raise revenues, even though some advisers fear this could give congressional Democrats opportunities to trim the sweeping business and personal tax reductions already approved.

The Outlook The Reagan Resolve: One More Time

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During the weeks leading up to President Reagan's announcement of his latest package of budget cuts last week, the administration sometimes appeared to be in disarray. The President flip-flopped on whether to raise money by delaying cost-of-living increases for Social Security recipients. His Secretary of Defense and his Budget Director squabbled over arms spending levels.

As it turned out, Mr. Reagan retreated slightly on several fronts. Despite the new proposal for \$16 billion in spending cuts and \$10 billion in tax increases for fiscal year 1982, which starts Thursday, Mr. Reagan won't quit meet his earlier goal of holding the deficit to \$23.5 billion. He decided to slow down his defense buildup. And he reluctantly sided with Budget Director David Stockman's desire for certain tax changes to raise revenues, even though some advisers fear this could give congressional Democrats opportunities to trim the sweeping business and personal tax reductions already approved.

But nothing in the new budget package compromises the administration's fundamental economic goals. The President repeatedly stressed the administration's balance budget and to reduce federal outlays to 19% of gross national product from the current 23% by 1984. And he repeated that the administration will not raise taxes.

Mr. MCI has succeeded largely by offering cheaper rates for long-distance telephone service. MCI has trumpeted this as a major achievement.

I write in newspapers and in radio advertisements. I am a cheaper service because, more efficient enter-preneur, more efficient entrepreneur. It calls attention to the fact that MCI has achieved a long-range increase between large cities where it is highly profitable and in less profitable routes to the west.

has also succeeded because it has raised money and its fancy legal firm, MCI spends extra on additional research and development. It has high-priced lawyers who press the company's regulators, on Capitol Hill. One of our R&D is legal staff. D. Swaney Jr., assistant vice president, is a lawyer.

The legal R&D effort fared well in July 1981, a fact that AT&T must be ill-equipped to handle. MCI's entry into the long-distance market is a high-profile, high-profile, and an expected rule on its fall, it is a decision, some observers believe, has been reversed. "It's inconceivable that AT&T would be able to do this."

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able to meet that it will stand up on appeal," says Calvert Gray, litigation analyst at Bear, Stearns & Co. He believes that the court's instructions to the jury guarantee a verdict against AT&T.

Even if MCI should win the legal case and walk off with billions of dollars, its battle with the Bell System will be far from over. These are tumultuous times in the telecommunications industry. Washington is considering major changes in policy and law that could alter the face of the industry and, in addition, complicate life at MCI. MCI's long-term strategy is to reduce spending and balance the budget before reducing taxes, the administration saw enactment of its tax-cut proposals as the fastest way to force cuts in federal spending and shrinkage of big government.

As Mr. Reagan made clear last week, the tax cuts force the entire government to accept the administration's motto — "Don't stand there, undo something."

Tough Flyweight Battling Big AT&T, Little MCI Keeps On Landing Sharp Blows

It Is Growing Fast, Hitting Bell Hard With Its Ads; But Court Case Isn't Over

'Legal R&D' Aids the Firm

By DENNIS WYKOCZ JR. Staff Reporter of The Wall Street Journal WASHINGTON — MCI Communications Corp. and American Telephone & Telegraph Co. both in the long-distance telephone business, but that's where the similarity ends.

As telephone companies go, MCI is small as a flea. AT&T is big as an elephant. And for a decade now, industry watchers have amused themselves by watching the elephant lift its mighty trunk and try to sweat the flea. But the flea won't go away.

In fact, MCI is one of the fastest-growing companies in the U.S. In the past two years, its revenues have doubled to \$24 million, its profits have tripled, and its common stock has become a hot ticket on Wall Street. As William McGowan, chairman and founder, joked to an inquiring shareholder at last year's annual meeting, the letters MCI stand for "massive growth."

The money is rolling in despite the fact that MCI started from scratch in an industry that measures its capital requirements in billions, not millions, of dollars. And millions are rolling in despite the fact that MCI is in head-to-head competition against AT&T's Long Lines Division, which has what amounts to a government license to make money and which many regard as the very heart of the Bell System.

A Real Fighter "You must give MCI a lot of credit. It was willing to undertake struggles that other companies wouldn't," says Victor Scott, president of Probe Research Inc., a Morristown, N.J., telecommunications research firm. More impressive than that, says consultant Harry Newton, "MCI has not been intimidated by AT&T's size."

MCI has succeeded largely by offering cheaper rates for long-distance telephone service. MCI has trumpeted this as a major achievement.

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A Kafkaesque Tale Of Health Faddists Eating Cockroaches

* * *

And Journalists Eating Crow,
As the Story Turns Out
To Be a Teacher's Hoax

By DAVID J. BLUM

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

NEW YORK—As Joseph Skaggs awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself transformed into a gigantic media event.

The Chicago Tribune, May 29, 1981: "A New York group called Metamorphosis led by one Josef Gregor, 40, who has a Ph.D. from an unnamed South American university, is madly chowing down 'cockroach' pills. The 70 persons believe that those interesting qualities that make the cockroach impervious to man's assaults will get them past the nagging everyday pain of acne, anemia, and yes, the misery of nuclear fallout."

Josef Gregor . . . Metamorphosis . . . the cockroach?

Yes, the roach story was a hoax, perpetrated by Joseph Skaggs, a teacher of journalism at New York's School of Visual Arts with a fondness for Franz Kafka and strong opinions about the gullibility of the press.

To his glee, the same story appeared in the Washington Star, the Philadelphia Inquirer, the Pittsburgh Press and about 175 other newspapers around the country, courtesy of the United Press International wire service.

"I guess no one reads Kafka anymore," laments Mr. Skaggs, who believes that the American news media will fall for just about any zany story—even if it isn't true. Mr. Skaggs may have proved his point.

Missed Clues

Certainly, a sizable number of the nation's editors missed his blatant clues: In the Czech author's famous "The Metamorphosis," Gregor Samsa is the character who awakens one morning to discover that he has become a giant insect resembling a cockroach.

"The media depend on people believing what they say," says Mr. Skaggs, a 35-year-old who spends his time painting, teaching or hoaxing. "Frankly, I think I'm helping the media out."

Most editors who were duped concede that the hoax reflects badly on their newspapers. "We frequently have to fill up pages with anything we can, and that's where the problem starts," says Charles Redden, news editor at the Dallas Times-Herald. The story showed up in its May 31, 1981, editions under the headline "Roach pills fill the bill."

But most also are quick to put the blame on UPI, which sent the story over its wires

on May 28. UPI has yet to send out a correction, even though Mr. Skaggs has told its editors the story was spurious. UPI, however, sees no reason to correct the item. "The story was accurate at the time," says Donald Reed, UPI's managing editor.

It all began when Mr. Skaggs broached the idea of the roach hoax to his 50 students last March.

"I'd been telling them how easily the media can be duped," he recalls, "but I wanted to show them." So he devised an idea that involved a mad scientist (Dr. Josef Gregor), an institute for research (Metamorphosis) and a wondrous cure for mankind (cockroach juice).

About 70 students and friends were enlisted in the project, and Mr. Skaggs threw in \$3,000 of his own money to pay for it. They rented an apartment for the press conference, ran off dozens of press releases, created "roach art," and prepared presentations designed to fool even the most skeptical reporter.

The press conference was set for May 22, and every major news organization in New York was invited. A press release even wound up at The Wall Street Journal, where a reporter was told to check out the story. But the Journal reporter wasn't able to confirm any of the "facts" in the news release, so he skipped the press conference. The Associated Press, UPI's competitor, also chose not to cover the press conference.

Among the five reporters who did show up was Ed Lion of UPI, accompanied by an agency photographer. After taking notes on Mr. Skaggs's brief appearance—dressed in a T-shirt and jacket, floppy hat and mirrored sunglasses—Mr. Lion interviewed some of his followers, all of them Mr. Skaggs's friends and students. One of them was quoted in the UPI story as follows:

"This isn't some sort of cult group or a crackpot idea—the pill really does work," said one of his (Dr. Gregor's) followers, Diane DiLauro, 34, a registered nurse who says she and her dentist-husband have taken the pill for a year.

"I used to have a lot of allergies and colds, but since taking this I haven't had one."

Mr. Skaggs had to duck out of the press

Please Turn to Page 23, Column 5



Joseph Skaggs

A Kafkaesque Tale Of Health Faddists Eating Cockroaches

Continued From First Page

conference early to appear on WNBC's local news program in New York "Live At Five." Wearing his costume, he told the TV audience about the miracle roach cure. Fred Farrar, the show's co-producer, says, "We knew it wasn't for real. We made that clear to people by winking a lot." But he admits that the show's hosts have yet to inform viewers of the hoax on the air.

Newspapers from the Bend (Ore.) Bulletin to the Louisville Courier-Journal published versions of the story after it appeared on the wire. Most were accompanied by a UPI photo showing "Dr. Gregor" holding up a dish containing a "super roach," according to most captions.

Donald Reed of UPI insists that the story was carefully checked before it went out on the wire. "We looked into his references and educational background," he says. But Mr. Skaggs says he only provided fictitious references to those who asked. The UPI reporter, Mr. Lion, is vacationing, and Mr. Reed says "he doesn't have any comment."

Many editors object to the wire service's handling of the incident. "They should have sent out a correction," says Denis Horgan, a columnist for the now-defunct Washington Star, who wrote a piece based on the original wire story that was published in his paper. "When something's wrong, the reader has a right to know about it," he says, "no matter how minor a story might be."

Mr. Reed of UPI says that even though



America's #1 hoaxer makes headlines that fool millions

He's bamboozled newspapers & television stations (but he's never caught out *The Enquirer*)

Hundreds of thousands of TV viewers were appalled to see a news report on a brothel for sexually deprived male dogs, staffed by "bewitching bitches."

But it turned out to be a clever hoax perpetrated by America's greatest practical joker, Joey Skaggs!

To fabricate his "Cathouse for Dogs," Skaggs got together 25 actors and 15 dogs in a rented loft and videotaped a lineup of seductive female canines — ranging from "Fifi the French Poodle," to "Lady the Tramp."

Skaggs sent the video to New York City's WABC-TV, which built a whole story around the tape — including the reactions of outraged veterinarians and ASPCA members.

Incredibly, the subsequent news report was nominated for a New York Emmy award — before Skaggs embarrassed station execs by revealing the whole thing as a hoax!

That's just one of more than 50 amazing practical jokes that Skaggs has executed over the past 28 years, with some of the more elaborate stunts costing as much as \$5,000.

His hoaxes have fooled millions — including many top reporters who've been left red-faced after passing on his phony stories as fact.

"All I have to do is set the wheels in motion. The media takes over from there," said Skaggs, a teacher at the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

Over the years, Skaggs has posed as:

- A doctor who cures baldness by transplanting hairy scalps from cadavers onto live bald men.
- The head of "The Fat



HOT DOG! Relax, folks, these tasty snacks Joey Skaggs cooked up (above) came from the supermarket. Joey's story that a food company wanted to make meals out of strays drew howls of protest. At left, Joey poses as a doctor with a bizarre cure for baldness.



Squad," a commando team of guerilla diet gurus who move in with tubby folks and physically restrain them from eating.

- The promoter of a virtual reality vacation resort called "Comacocoon," where vacationers experience all the

pleasures of an exotic vacation, while under total anesthesia. "You'd get tanned, relaxed and you wouldn't have to worry about losing your luggage," he chuckled.

- A food service supplier seeking unwanted dogs to be turned into meals.

Skaggs' wacky fake stories almost always get picked up and covered by gullible members of the mainstream media.

"I'm trying to teach people to beware of slipshod and deceptive journalism," Skaggs explained. "People should be skeptical of all that they hear."

For the "dog food" scam, Skaggs mailed 1,500 letters to animal shelters across the country announcing that his company was seeking to pur-

chase unwanted dogs at 10 cents per pound, for human consumption.

The letters included a New York City phone number. The phone was answered by a recorded message — with barking dogs in the background!



Within two days the phone line was swamped with thousands of calls from angry dog lovers, police and reporters.

"Radio, newspaper and TV reporters around the country reported on this story," said Skaggs. "Several reports even detailed conversations that individuals claimed to have had with a representative of the company — none of those conversations ever took place."

The prankster always provides clues that give reporters a fair chance to uncover his fabrications — but they almost never do.

The biggest red flag is usually the wacky names he chooses for his aliases.

"When I was head of the 'Fat Squad,' I told a morning TV show my name was Joe Bones," he said. "Did that set off any bells? No — they WANTED to believe the story."

Media critic Jeff Cohen of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting calls Skaggs, 48, "a genius."

"He proves that reporters just rush some stories into print, not even caring if they're true or not."

Skaggs admits there IS one publication he's never been able to dupe with his phony stories: "I haven't gotten one past *The ENQUIRER* yet!"

— CHRIS RODELL

The opportunities of the past are now obvious.

— Robert Half

Surprise! Single gals spend more on cars and tobacco than guys do

Single women spend more of their paychecks on cars and tobacco products than their male counterparts, a recent study reveals.

Men are more likely to tinker with their cars and do their own repairs, while women pay to

have mechanics do the job.

Gals also spend 30 percent more on clothes than men do, twice as much on personal grooming, and nearly five times more on household items such as cleaning supplies, according to the University of South Florida study of singles, age 21 to 35.

OLD FOLKS ARE THE MOST HONEST PEOPLE, POLL FINDS

If you ever lose a wallet containing \$1,000 in cash, pray an oldster finds it. In a nationwide poll, only 2 percent of folks over age 65 said they'd keep the money — but 21 percent of people between 18 and 34 would hang on to it!

That's one of several eye-openers in the recent poll of

1,000 adults. Here are more:

Nearly one out of four people — 24 percent — say they wouldn't correct a waiter who undercharged them on a food bill. And 23 percent would commit a crime if they could pocket \$10 million without getting caught, according to the poll conducted by Money magazine.

Veejay covers up for runway strut

Page Six™

By RICHARD JOHNSON
with KIMBERLEY RYAN

Durable Webb

ROBERT Morgenthau, Manhattan DA since anyone can remember, has nothing against Attorney General Janet Reno. But he told Mary Perot Nichols' class at NYU that Reno isn't really in charge at the Justice Dept. Morgenthau is still pursuing his investigation of the BCCI scandal which mixed up a lot of powerful Democrats with some shady Middle Easterners in a huge bank collapse. Morgenthau is annoyed that Justice is thwarting his efforts, but he doesn't blame Reno. He told the class that President Clinton's old Arkansas crony Webster Hubbell, who stepped down as Reno's No. 2 some months ago in the wake of Whitewater, is still at the department three days a week. The title of Nichols' course, by the way, is "Government Conspiracies & Coverups."

Hail Philip

BARBARALEE Diamonstein Spielvogel and her New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation are honoring Philip Johnson Thursday at a Plaza Hotel luncheon. The octogenarian architect will be given the foundation's medal of honor for his design of the Four Seasons restaurant and his collaboration with Mies van der Rohe on the Seagram building, among other achievements. Past honorees include Brooke Astor for her fights to save Grand Central Terminal and then-Mayor Robert Wagner for introducing the country's first landmarks law in 1965. Some 400 are expected, including Sid and Mercedes Bass, I.M. Pei, Phyllis Lambert and Donald Trump.



KIAM: unoriginal

VICTOR Kiam will soon be back on the air. The 68 year-old owner of Remington Products is a hired pitchman for the new credit card Travel Plus. Smart Money magazine reports the commercial borrows heavily from the Remington spot which shows Kiam holding a razor and explaining he "liked it so much, [he] bought the whole company." Kiam blinks, holds up the card, and says, "And I should have bought it with this." How's that for originality in today's advertising?

IT'S not just the quality of its food, the rudeness of its waiters, the shortage of taxicabs — Paris is *tres* different from New York in *beau-coup* ways, as antics at the ready-to-wear shows proved last weekend.

Kennedy, the virginal MTV star, knew she wasn't in Kansas anymore, or Manhattan for that matter, when a group of nude models backstage at the Jean Paul Gaultier show started sprinkling metallic glitter over their *mons pubis*.

The mannequins, some of whom opted instead for sunflower g-strings, were preparing to model Gaultier's see-through mesh dresses, which Kennedy — making her runway debut — would have nothing to do with. The Republican veejay, who landed the catwalk job when she hosted Gaultier on her show earlier this year, chose a far less revealing outfit, as did Madonna and Isabella Rossellini.

But if some New Yorkers had a hard time relating to Parisians, the opposite was true too. In a glaring example of Gallic intolerance, a

group of Gotham club kids — led by James St. James, Jenny Talla, Richie Rich and Walt Paper — were attacked by a mob of homophobes as they were boite-hopping on Sunday.

The club kids — known for their wacky clothes, neon-dyed (or shaved) hair, and fondness for body-piercing — came to town with New York nightclub impresario Jeffrey Jah to host a party at Queen, a younger, louder sister club of Les Bains, the hottest spot in the City of Light for the last 11 years.

After being chased into the sanctuary of a cafe, they called the *gendarmes* for an escort and got back to their hotel safely.

As for the Material Girl, the only cultural adjustment problem she had was the lack of punctuality. Madonna braved a horde of photographers to take her front seat at the John Galliano show. But she never saw it. The show was almost two hours late in starting when she made her exit.

Steve Florio, the powerful Conde Nast president, knew he was far from home when he ar-

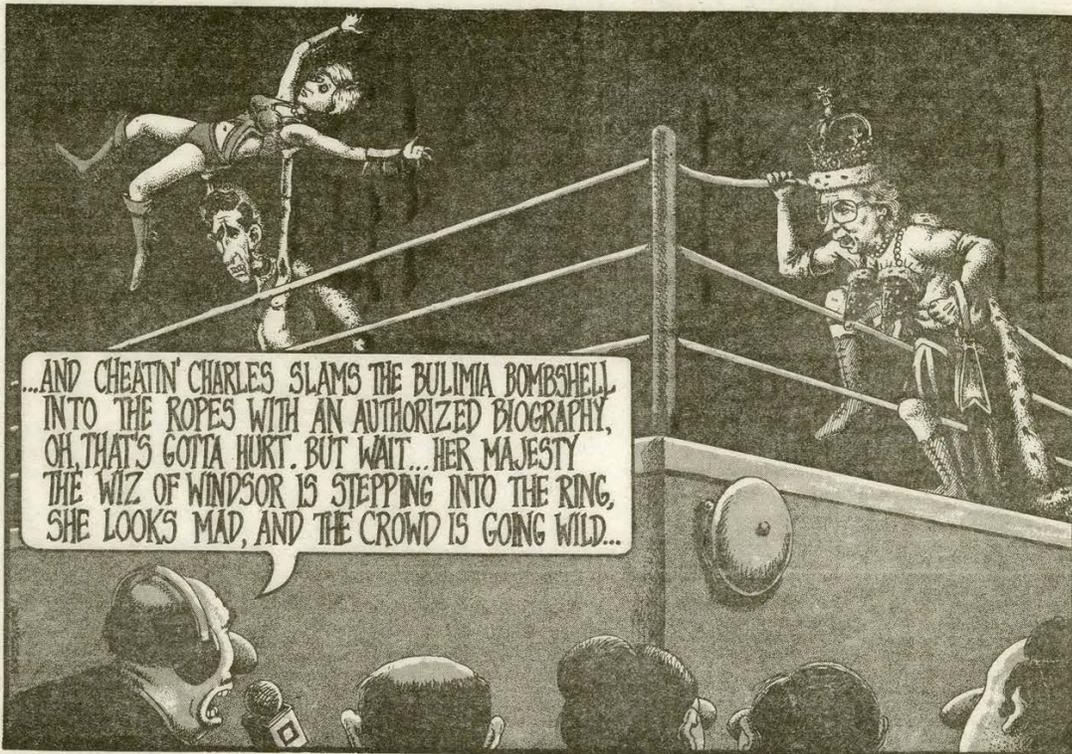
rived at the residence of U.S. Ambassador to France Pamela Harriman and the security men wouldn't let him in. "You're name isn't on the list," he was told.

"But the party is being held for *me*," Florio explained. The guest of honor was finally admitted after producing his driver's license.

Inside, Harriman was hitting it off with Janice Dickinson, the gorgeous single mother who left Sylvester Stallone for Vanity Fair publisher Ron Galotti.

When the Ambassador asked Dickinson how she felt being subjected to intense media scrutiny, the model replied: "You should know." Harriman has been immortalized as the greatest courtesan of the century in Christopher Ogdens' biography, "Life of the Party," and she was recently sued by her in-laws for \$27 million. Harriman suggested she and Dickinson have a long chat. We'd love to be a *mouche* on the wall for that one.

[The look of Lagerfeld at the Paris show: story and photos, page 31.]



Sightings

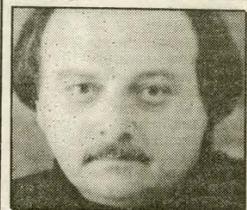
MARCIA Clark, the curly-topped O.J. Simpson prosecutor, checking out the \$19.70-a-dozen

jeans at the Price Club in Burbank on Saturday afternoon with her two kids. Fans swarmed to say hello... **JOHN Kennedy** putting his red binoculars in the trunk of

a cab Sunday afternoon in front of Polo Sport on Madison Avenue and joining an attractive blonde in the back seat for some immediate canoodling... **PATRICK Ewing** outbidding pretty philanthropist Kathleen Burns Buddenhagen for an 8-week-old chocolate Labrador retriever at the second annual Michael Bolton Celebrity Tennis Classic and Auction. The \$22,000 for the pooch goes to charity.

Enquirer falls to media scammer

MEDIA hoaxer Joey Skaggs finally added the elusive National Enquirer to his list of suckers. The man who came up with cathouses for dogs, hair transplants from cadavers, and a company that churns stray pets into soup is featured in the Oct. 25 issue under a headline that brags about the Enquirer's invincibility to a Skaggs scam. The article innocently quotes Skaggs' belief that "slipshod and deceptive journalism" keeps his ruses going, and ends with his sarcastic tip of the hat: "I haven't gotten one past The Enquirer yet!" But splashed across the page are three photos of a Skaggs imposter. The captions identify him as Joey, but it's his heavier, older friend, Peter Insalaco. Confessed Skaggs to PAGE SIX: "They called me for the story, so it wasn't planned. But I couldn't resist. How could you not want to get the Enquirer?" True to form, Skaggs left clues in case anyone did their homework. Not only had the tab previously published photos of the real Skaggs, he sent them background articles which also contained the genuine image. Even better, Enquirer photographer Mario Suriani had once shot Skaggs for the Boston Globe and warmly greeted the imposter during the session and recounted some old times with him. Enquirer editor John Cathcart refused to admit his paper had been had. "We completely stand by the photos until we see evidence to the contrary," he insisted. Countered Joey: "They'll say or do anything to lessen the embarrassment... besides, I just got an angry fax from the guy who shot the pictures — he's not a happy photographer."



FRANZ: blown cover

"NYPD Blue's" **Dennis Franz** may soon be the butt of a few precinct jokes when his cop character finally drops his drawers on air. Said Franz via computer on Prodigy: "Will viewers ever get to see Andy Sipowicz's bare butt? The producers keep saying it will happen... There is talk of a big shower scene with Costas and Sipowicz. I've asked for a couple of weeks of notice to try and get in shape, but I think the farthest I'll probably go is to skip breakfast that morning."

Trading up

LIKE a Broadway show, Gaugin, in the old Trader Vic's space at the Plaza, had three months of previews before tonight's official opening. During the tryouts, the management refined the menu, changed the decor, maybe fired some of the clumsier waitresses, and built a VIP room, called the Opium Den, where the promised swells tonight will include **Donald Trump**, the joint's landlord, **Tony Bennett**, **Rosie Perez**, **Matt Dillon**, **Donna Karan** and **Yoko Ono**.

'Who will pay that kind of money to stay on a diet? People who are desperate, people who have tried everything else . . .'

Joe Bones

Mean in the name of lean

By JOHN CARR

The refrigerator door opens silently in the night and a sliver of light scores the linoleum floor.

Suddenly, the still dark is shattered:

'Freeze, turkey! Drop it NOW!'

The Fat Squad strikes again.

'We're strict. In fact, we're mean. We're the Fat Squad commandos, and we're proud.' That's Joe Bones speaking. A nice person, basically, but a bad hombre when it comes to dieters. See, the dieters pay him \$300 a day, and he or one of his commandos moves right in for a little intense surveillance.

Ever vigilant

'We are on the job, breakfast, lunch and dinner,' he said. 'We are even there in the middle of the night. The Fat Squad commandos never sleep.'

Bones runs a new business designed to make diets succeed for people who have tried everything else. When you hire the Fat Squad, you don't cheat on your diet. They don't let you.



Also, when you hire the Fat Squad, you can't fire them.

'We move in and we provide the discipline,' Bones said. 'If need be, we will tie you to the bed to keep you from breaking your diet.'

Your \$300 actually buys you three commandos, each on an eight-hour shift. They go to work with you, come home with you, accompany

you on dates.

Reasonable force

The client signs a document allowing the commandos to use "reasonable physical force" to prevent the dieter from eating "unauthorized food."

If you don't want them listening to your every word, they will wear headsets that block out the sound. But they will watch you, and they

won't go away. Once you hire these commandos, you are stuck with them for the term of the agreement, which is at least three days.

'That's the crucial period with dieting,' Bones said, 'just as it is with smoking.'

(You also can rent commandos who won't let you smoke, but so far nobody has.)

After the \$900 for three

days, you can add extra days at the rate of \$250 each.

Desperate remedy

'Who will pay that kind of money to stay on a diet?' Bones asked rhetorically. 'People who are desperate, people who have tried everything else and can't take the time to admit themselves to a health spa or a fat farm.'

When you sign up, the Fat Squad "shakes down the place," Bones said. The refrigerator and pantry are cleared of all foods that are not on your diet. Other parts of the house, including the bathrooms, are searched for "caches." "You don't trick a Fat Squad commando," Bones said.

The Fat Squad has been operating in the metropolitan area for about three months. Its headquarters are at 107 Waverly Place in Greenwich Village (phone: (212) 254-7878), but the commandos will go anywhere.

So far, the Fat Squad has had 40 customers and the number of inquiries is going up, Bones said. "We get good word of mouth," he explained.

Knight-Ridder Newspapers

INSIDE

INVASION OF CINEMA MONSTERS Hollywood is beginning its annual invasion of summer movies early. Beware. Better pay attention to the reviews. ALSO:

MONDO CONDO. For stars 30 years past their prime, the Florida condominium circuit offers one final spotlight. City Lights

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DAILY NEWS

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ACCU-WEATHER

Local Forecast

Intervals of clouds and sunshine with a breeze at times Sunday. High 67. Partly cloudy Sunday night. Low 51 in mid-town.

Five Day Forecast

TODAY: Periods of clouds and sunshine. High 67, low 50. TOMORROW: Partial sunshine and cooler. High 64, low 46. TUESDAY: Partly to mostly sunny but cooler. High 67, low 48. WEDNESDAY: Sunshine. High 70, low 50. THURSDAY: Partly sunny. High 72, low 52.

Temperatures in N.Y.

Saturday Max. 72 at 4:00 p.m. Saturday Min. 44 at 5:00 a.m. Highest May 10, 74 in 1977. Lowest May 10, 38 in 1966. Mean temperature, 58; normal, 60; average temperature departure since May 1, -3.00. Degree days May 9, 7; since July 1, 445; last year to this date, 422; normal to date, 474.

Precipitation

Yesterday, 0.00, total since May 1, 0.11, total since January 1, 12.58 inches; normal since January 1, 13.20 inches; last year to this date, 13.24 inches.

Apparent temperature

Apparent temperature measures the feel of the weather, taking into account temperatures and relative humidity.

Yesterday 8 a.m. 51, noon 54, 4 p.m. 71 Today 8 a.m. 53, noon 62, 4 p.m. 66

Pollution Forecast

Air quality will be moderate through Monday.

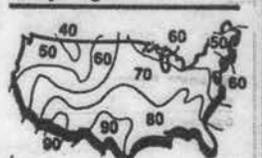
Today's Highs—Tonight's Lows



National Summary

Some showers will occur in the eastern New England states Sunday with showers moving into the Northwest. The northern Rockies will have some rain at times. A band of showers and thunderstorms will affect areas from Minnesota into Mississippi. By Sunday night, these showers and thunderstorms will have moved into Ohio and through northern Georgia.

Today's Highs



U.S. Cities

Table with columns for City, Today, and Tomorrow. Includes cities like Albany, Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Honolulu, Houston, Kansas City, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis, New Orleans, Orlando, Phoenix, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Portland, Salt Lake City, San Francisco, San Juan, and Washington.

Foreign Cities

Table with columns for City, Today, and Tomorrow. Includes cities like Athens, Berlin, Cairo, Dublin, Jerusalem, London, Madrid, Montreal, Moscow, Ottawa, Paris, Rome, Stockholm, Tokyo, and Warsaw.

Key to Codes

S Sunny, S Cloudy, B Rain, T Thunder, F Ice, SN Snow, PC Partly cloudy, SH Showers, T Thunderstorms, SF Snow flurries, SN Snow

Policing the Pounds

The Fat Squad: How to Lose Weight With Hired Help

By Robert Pfeiffer
Special to The Washington Post

Dump the doughnuts. Chuck the chocolate. The Fat Squad is coming.

It's the newest strategic advance in the ongoing Battle of the Bulge, the brainchild of one Joseph Bones (his real name), a New York entrepreneur who decided three months ago to wage the war against fat on previously unexplored turf—*your* turf.

For a hefty \$300 a day (with a three-day minimum) Bones' loyal band of Fat Squad "commandos" will accompany you through every hour of the day and night, with the sole purpose of keeping you on your diet.

They will go wherever you go. To your job. To your bedroom. To your bathroom. They will even eat—a little—with you.

But be warned. The commandos have explicit instructions to enforce prescribed dietary regimens with complete authority. All entering the program must sign a release, wherein the rules are set forth.

Among them: "The Fat Squad and its agents will not be liable for any illness, discomfort, mental anguish, or any other condition arising from a diet which you may suffer . . ."

And suffer they do, says Bones. "We've had people try to hide chocolate bars in the bathroom."

Such subterfuge is usually foiled, however, by another clause in the agreement, which gives Fat Squad agents full search and seizure rights where fattening goodies are concerned.

"Basically, these are people who have realized that they just can't do it themselves," Bones says. "If a client is eating something that is not on their diet, the commandos are there to take it out of their hands. We're finding out that people simply need to be told what they can and cannot do when it comes to their eating habits. In many ways, they're reliving their childhood."

Including, as one might expect, the occasional temper tantrum.

"We've had some people get pretty angry. But we tell people from the beginning that once you've hired us, you can't fire us. We also have intelligent commandos."

The Fat Squad, he says, is made up mostly of actors, as they take well to both the role playing and the odd hours required of the commandos, who work in eight-hour shifts at \$7 an hour. They are often chosen with the life style of the client in mind. For business types, Bones assigns discreet, conservatively dressed agents, who are instructed to don stereo headphones during



BY SARAH JONES
Joseph Bones: "We've had people try to hide chocolate bars in the bathroom."

particularly sensitive corporate gatherings.

Or, if the client needs a more conspicuous reminder, Bones will readily assign a commando with a stronger personality. "If people prefer to be bossed, we have some pretty tough-looking characters, who are there to intimidate."

One client, a television executive who received three days with the Fat Squad as a 40th birthday present from his wife, verified the distinct presence of this "intimidation factor": "Some of these people are gigantic. And although they're very supportive, they're also very serious about their jobs."

The executive, who preferred to remain anonymous, pointed out that his wife's enthusiasm for the program ended at the bedroom door. "She made me sleep out in the living room with the commando." He added that he did in fact "lose a few pounds," but admitted that he will remember the Fat Squad more for its novelty than for its long-term effectiveness.

Another anonymous client, a diabetic, chose to enroll for a rigorous two-week program at a discounted \$1,750 a week. "I lost 30 pounds in two grueling, embarrassing weeks. They frisked me. They made an inventory of everything that I had in the house. They went through my drawers, my medicine cabinet. The only thing they allowed was a candy bar, which they held in case of an insulin reaction."

The turning point for him came

during a rather heated argument with one of the commandos in a Greek diner. The subject of the debate was the diner's reputable rice pudding, whose freshness he had inquired about. The commando quietly suggested cottage cheese, and the sparks flew. "Our voices started to escalate, until I began to hear how stupid I sounded. I was screaming for a bowl of pudding. Reaching that point was worth the price of the program."

The genesis of Bones' business was a joking remark made by an ex-marine buddy. "His wife had been trying to get him to lose 20 pounds," says Bones, "and he said that it would take a 24-hour drill sergeant to do it."

Today the Fat Squad is a thriving enterprise. It has already served more than 30 clients, Bones says, and his staff of 50 commandos are "almost all busy." They will travel anywhere, he adds, if their expenses are paid, but he is quick to point out that clients must first consult with their doctors before signing up. He also sees the Fat Squad branching out into the treatment of other addictions, such as gambling and alcoholism.

Whether Bones' troop of enforcers will survive the perils of the fickle weight-loss industry remains to be seen. For now, though, Bones is content in his role as chief of the Fat Squad, whose motto may as well be the words he uses to describe his employees: "Cordial, but Strict."



Fat Squad puts one over on some thick heads

DAVID Hartman of *Good Morning America* will probably strangle the editor of *The Daily News* when he reads this.

The *News*, where somebody should have checked the clips, ran a story by John Carr of Knight-Ridder News Service on Sunday about the Fat Squad — the last word in dieting. The group says that for \$300 a day it will go into your home and physically restrain you from eating.

So there was David yesterday interviewing Joe Bones, head of the Fat Squad, and his commandos on national TV.

David appeared entranced as Bones told how his Fat Squad frisked husbands for food contraband as they returned from the bathroom and tackled wives as they made for the fridge.

As Bones explained that he and his squad were military vets and empowered under their client contracts to resort to some violence, *GMA* cameras panned across the studio to the Fat Squad — grim-faced men in dark glasses, en-

forcers of the Rambo Diet.

Trouble is, guys — you at *The News* and you, dear Dave — Joe Bones is Joe Skaggs, and it's all a hoax.

Joe, a veteran media hoaxer, told PAGE SIX: "I mean even the name — Joe Bones as head of a Fat Squad? Come on."

A quick look into Joe's background shows that he has promoted "Cathouses for Dogs," "Vitamin Pills for Cockroaches" and traffic rules barring fat pedestrians from wearing colorful clothes that distract.

New York Times ace Clyde Haberman once fell for Joe's impersonation of "Jo-Jo the Gypsy" who wanted to form a Gypsy anti-defamation league and outlaw the term "Gypsy moth."

With his latest Fat Squad gag, he has managed to snag *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *The Miami Herald*, *The Washington Post*, the BBC, French TV Channel 1 and, now *The Daily News* and David Hartman.

It's a bit more embarrassing for David because Joe Skaggs, together with two of his "commandos," had actually appeared before on *GMA* — promoting condominiums for fish.

Joe Skaggs actually gives his own address in Waverly Place and his real-life telephone number when he sends out his press releases.

"I just do it to be audacious," he said. "I've been doing it for 20 years. I can't believe that people fall for it, but they do."

"The things I do are funny, but they're not just pranks. There is a larger social significance — that the media can be fooled so easily."

We asked *GMA* producer John Goodman how he lined up Joe:

"We found out about it through *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and — sorry about this — *The New York Daily News*."

"I never take any money," says Joe Bones/Skaggs. He makes his "honest" money lecturing on campuses throughout the country.



JULIANNE: property owner

THAT most famous New Jersey native, Bruce Springsteen, has gotten himself a Manhattan pad. Our sources report that The Boss plunked down \$975,000 for a two-bedroom pied a terre in an elegant townhouse just off Fifth Avenue on East 62d Street. Fans will have to figure out the address for themselves. Bruce celebrated his first wedding anniversary on Monday, so maybe that's why, our very good sources tell us, the apartment is in the name of wife Julianne Phillips.

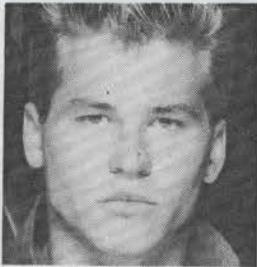
Out of work

LATEST chapter in "The New York Times-Bible Belt Caper" is an unhappy one for Bob Ursul. The Times Co., as we noted yesterday, found itself making money out of a newspaper it owned in Gadsden, Ala., that ran racy headlines like "Breasts Big in Kitchen." First, editor Bob Ursul was suspended. Last night he was fired. And now he says he is going to sue The Times for wrongful dismissal. Gadsden *Free Times* publisher Frank Helderman Jr., told him: "It's time for us to separate." Ursul, who claims Helderman had encouraged him in his racy endeavors, adds: "I hear Sydney Gruson called him at 2 a.m. saying he was drinking wine at his country estate and that I had to go." Gruson, vice chairman of The Times Co. and a true patriot, was gracious in answering our call: "I have to correct your erroneous information. I would never call anybody at 2 a.m. unless it was an emergency. Let me put you in contact with our lawyer." Lawyer Katharine Darrow called back. She refused to comment on anything.

By RICHARD JOHNSON

Metamorphosis

JOHN McEnroe has undergone a total transformation since quitting the tennis circuit earlier this year. John, spotted at a recent Los Angeles Lakers game with a full beard, also has a new body. He's been working out regularly at a sports training center in Santa Monica where several stars whip their bodies into shape. He's also chowing down on health food while waiting for Tatum O'Neal to give birth, an event expected within a week. "He's never looked better," a friend told PAGE SIX. Johnnie Mack will skip Wimbledon, it seems, but will play in a couple of tune-up tournaments to see how he feels before the U.S. Open in August.



VAL: top training
PRODUCERS Don Simpson and Jerry Bruckheimer are gunning

PAGE SIX

for Rambo-like profits for *Top Gun*, their full-throttle patriotic film starring Tom Cruise and Kelly McGillis. But the brains behind *Flashdance* and *Beverly Hills Cop* want to avoid Rambo's bellcoast image. After the other night's star-studded *Top Gun* screening, Simpson told PAGE SIX: "Four years ago we decided that our movie wasn't going to be

about war or combat. It was going to be about the internal war within one pilot." It was only later at Palladium, after everybody had a few drinks, that *Top Gun* star Val Kilmer told guests that some of the Navy pilots who trained him for the film's incredible dogfights were involved in last month's Libyan air strike. "That's something Simpson didn't mention." Simpson and Bruckheimer don't want everybody to think that they're warmongers," a source told us.

Kook plan

PHIL Donahue isn't the only fellow who doesn't care for Lyndon LaRouche and his followers. GOP gubernatorial candidate Andy O'Rourke wants a bipartisan effort in the Empire State to avoid what happened in Illinois, where Adlai Stevenson III quit the Democratic ticket when he found himself stuck with LaRouchian running mates. "We need to prevent kooks and oddballs like the Larouchies from ... talking over political parties in New York," Andy said. He's urged state Republican boss Tony Colavita to get together with state Dem. boss Laurence Kirwan to talk strategy.

Fightin' words

KRIS Kristofferson, Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson and Johnny Cash may look as if they're fighting Indians on this Sunday's TV remake of *Stagecoach* — but in their hearts the stars are probably shooting at the movie's producers. "I'm doing this movie with a pistol to my head," grouses Kris in *TV Guide*. "The script is just a comic book ... Every bit of the dialogue is contrived. [The producers] sold this to CBS on the basis of having Willie, John, Waylon and me, and now they want to do it as cheap ... as possible. I'm in it because of my friendship with those three, but if I didn't think I was going to get sued, I'd be outta here ... No matter how hard we work, it's still going to be a piece of crap." Whoa!

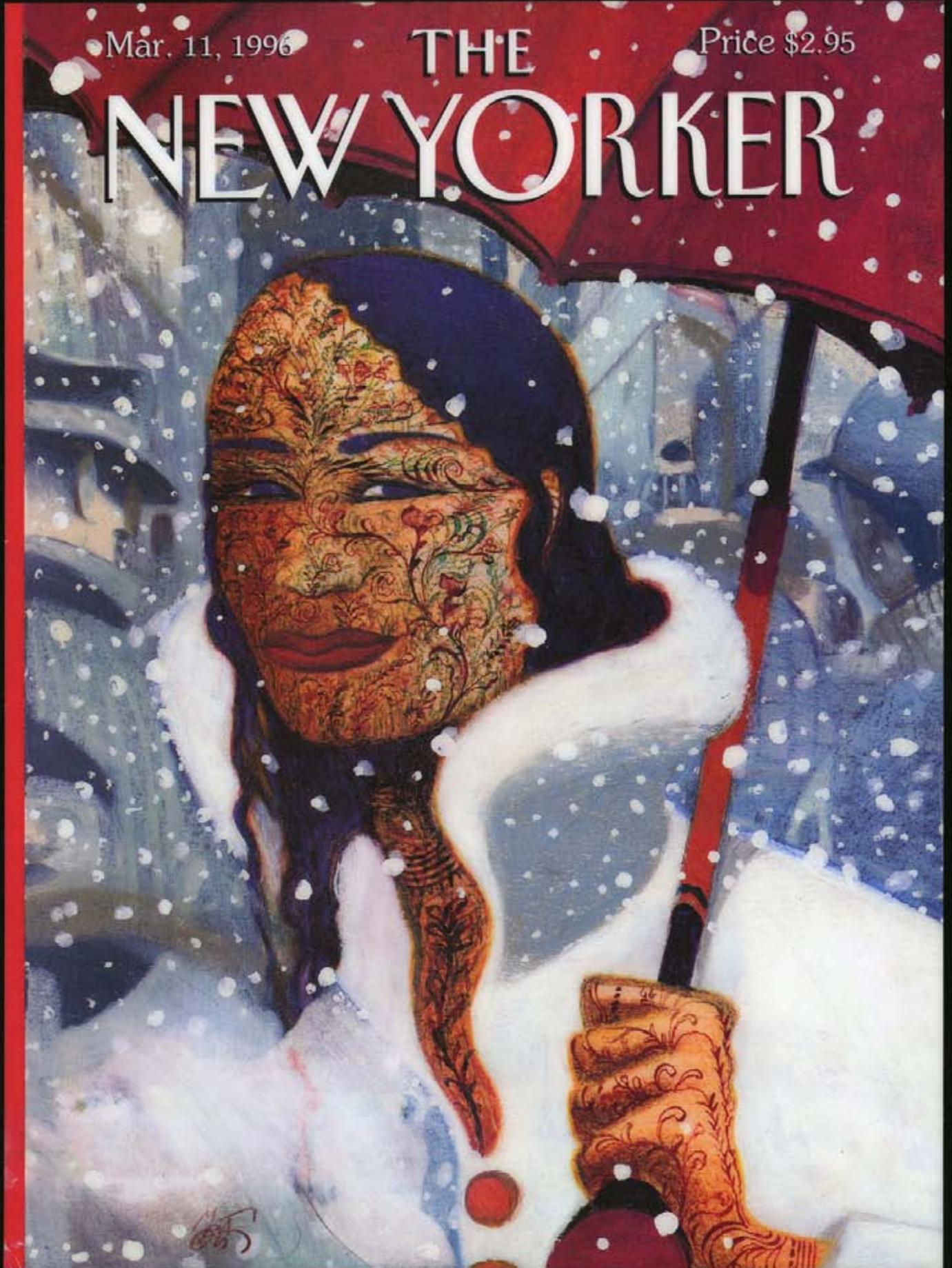
Media man's choice: porn or presidency

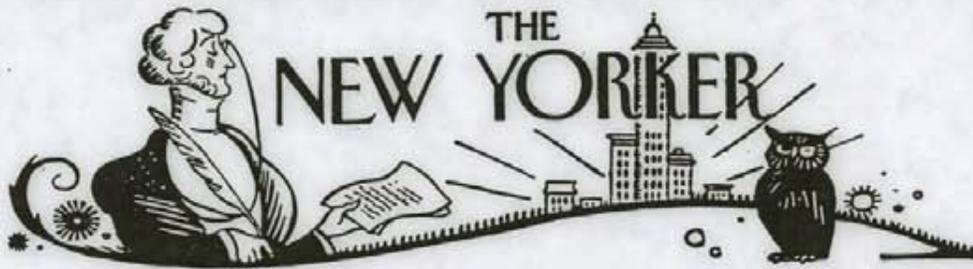
IMAGINE the scenario: President Jack Kemp, handsome, clean-cut All-American boy, family man and dedicated foe of pornography, helped into office by the good graces of the political consulting firm of Russo, Watts & Rollins. The last name belongs to Ed Rollins, former aide to President Reagan. Ed left the White House in August 1985 as political director and immediately hitched his wagon to George Bush. Then in early 1986 he said that if Sen. Paul Laxalt ran, he would get behind him. Last Thursday, who do you think he had lunch with? Jack Kemp. (The Bush camp was predictably furious. Said one insider: "The only person Rollins hasn't come out for is Bob Dole. If I were Bob Dole, I would be insulted.") We asked Kemp's main man, John Buckley, about Kemp's attitude toward pornography: "Very conservative ... against it." So John was interested to learn that Rollins has also talked with Penthouse organization COO Dave Myerson. Dave wanted Ed's counsel on how Bob Guccione should fight the 7-Eleven stores' ban on his magazines. Said John Roberts, v.p. of Rollins' firm: "There are no commitments from either side. The jump from Kemp to Guccione is one thing we have to think about. I don't think Mr. Guccione will be president of the United States." Next day an anxious Ed Rollins called PAGE SIX: "I spoke to representatives for Penthouse. I'm not representing them. I am happy to see anybody." Incidentally, last year Rollins also repped TV evangelist Pat Robertson, yet another man who's been talked about as presidential contender.

Mar. 11, 1996

Price \$2.95

THE NEW YORKER





THE TALK OF THE TOWN

THE NEW YORKER, FEBRUARY 5, 1996

JURY TAMPERING

THERE'S a new hot-button issue in the American legal community these days: computerized juries. An artificial-intelligence expert named Dr. Joseph Bonuso recently announced that he and his colleagues at New York University Law School had successfully completed work on the Solomon Project—a computer program that, using “voice-stress analysis” of courtroom testimony and a process called “fuzzy logic,” arrives at trial verdicts. When Dr. Bonuso made public the results of the program’s verdicts in some notorious cases—it acquitted Mike Tyson and convicted Claus von Bülow, the Menendez brothers, William Kennedy Smith, and O. J. Simpson—he was roundly denounced by attorneys and judges, embraced by talk-radio hosts, and enthusiastically covered by mainstream media outlets like the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *American Lawyer*, and CNN. But, before you tear up your most recent call to jury duty, take heed: the Solomon Project is a hoax—another score for the performance artist and media prankster Joey Skaggs.

Skaggs, whose past scams include Portofess (a portable confession booth) and the Fat Squad (a band of for-hire commandos who forcibly restrained dieters from overeating), says that the Solomon Project was meant as a serious commentary on our judicial system and, specifically, on the Simpson trial. “Most of America wanted to hear definitively that O. J. Simpson was guilty,” he said, sipping a glass of red wine in his Sullivan Street apartment the other day. “They wanted a computer to say, ‘He did it.’”

At first, Skaggs, no expert in law or computers, didn’t answer the phone line that he had dedicated to the Solomon Project, though he methodically recorded all messages left at the number. His reticence backfired when callers, desperate to find Dr. Bonuso, besieged the N.Y.U. press office with inquiries. Initially, N.Y.U. offered to help publicize the Solomon Project, but after the school discovered that no Joseph Bonuso taught there, its attorneys threatened legal action.

Skaggs, meanwhile, was emboldened by the number of responses and, as Dr. Bonuso, began to take phone calls and grant interviews. He was even a guest on a couple of live radio call-in shows. No one seemed to mind as Dr. Bonuso stumbled through technical explanations of his Solomon Project. Eventually, producers from CNN tracked him down.

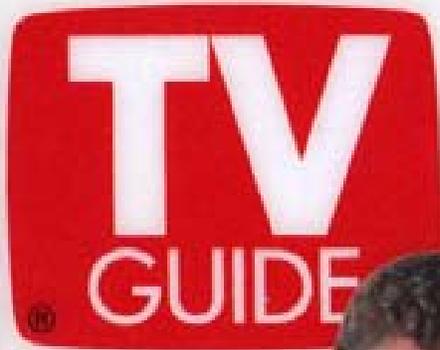
Skaggs was delirious: television is a hoaxer’s promised land. He borrowed an office full of computers, got twenty-five actors to staff them or play reporters, and enlisted programmers to design something—anything—to put on the computer screens. (One result: an image of O. J. Simpson’s head with the word “GUILTY” flashing above it.) When CNN arrived, the presence of print “journalists” and camera crews gave the suggestion of a real media event. (One of the cameras belonged to Frederick Marx, the director of “Hoop Dreams,” who was filming the hoax for a documentary on Skaggs.) For an hour and a half, actors typed away with the sour expressions of alienated data-entry clerks, while Skaggs, sitting

before the camera with the straight face of a career prankster, predicted doom for human juries. After the CNN crew left, Skaggs looked around the room at his actors, pumped his fist, and howled, “Yes!” Two days later, after taping angry responses from some lawyers, CNN ran the segment on “PrimeNews.” The story was aired repeatedly on “Headline News,” and a multimedia version is still posted at CNN’s World Wide Web site.



Joey Skaggs

It turns out that the reading public was more skeptical than the media. A hundred or so letters were sent to the Solomon Project; one, from a K. Michael Young, of Nome, Alaska, ended, “Really, I would like to hear from you that this is a strange joke, meant to promote and provoke discussion about the very serious matter of justice.” A beaming Skaggs crooned, “I can’t wait to call this guy up and say, ‘Right on!’”



July 29-Aug. 4
75¢

Mood Busters
**The Shows That'll
Make You
Feel Better**

By Dr. Joyce
Brothers
Page 12

**What Makes
Maria
Shriver
Run So
Fast**

Page 6



**Does
Married...with Children
Go Too Far?
Will It Give in to Critics?**

Page 2



Pranks a Lot!



Photo: Z. J. J. J.

Do you know the man in the photograph? You might have seen him on ABC's *Good Morning America* in 1986, using the name Joe Bones. You could have met him in 1987 as Dr. Richard J. Long, marine biologist, or earlier as Jo-Jo, King of the New York Gypsies. He's also been Dr. Josef Gregor, world-famous entomologist with a cure-all pill made from cockroach extract, and Giuseppe Scaggoli, director of a celebrity sperm bank.

David Hartman, former host of *GMA*, and the folks at *Entertainment Tonight* and *CNN* have still other names for him, none of them printable. That's because they're among the many media people who have been hoodwinked in grand fashion by Joey Skaggs, 43, media prankster and one of the country's premier

hoax artists.

When he appeared on Hartman's morning show, Skaggs was posing as Joe Bones, founder of The Fat Squad—a team of diet commandos who, for a mere \$300 a day, would physically restrain their clients from overeating. It was all a gag. Hartman and co-host Joan Lunden should have known better, says the hoax-master, because Skaggs had appeared on the show a year earlier under his real name to display his aquatic sculptures called "condominiums for fish." In real life Skaggs is a multimedia artist whose works—including the fish condos—are shown in museums and art galleries.

In other scams, Skaggs has posed as Jo-Jo, King of the New York Gypsies, to protest the name of the gypsy moth. ("Call it the Hitler moth," he cried. "We Gypsies have taken enough abuse!") He once made headlines by announcing that he was going to be the first to windsurf from Hawaii to California. And as Dr. Richard J. Long, marine biologist, he was head of the "Save the Geoduck" campaign in Seattle—the geoduck being a giant clam with a long appendage. The geoduck really exists, but "Dr. Long" claimed it was used as an aphrodisiac by the Japanese. (It isn't.)

Why does he do it? Mostly for fun and publicity, but also to keep reporters on their toes. Skaggs thinks media folk are too often lazy about checking stories and that people in general are too gullible. His purpose, he told *TV Guide*, is "to make some people laugh and some people question."

Media people have to get up early if they expect to stay ahead of incurable pranksters. When *Entertainment Tonight* did a story on media hoaxers last year, they invited Skaggs to appear on the show. Ever obliging and terminally mischievous, he agreed. Then, of course, he sent somebody else, posing as Joey Skaggs, to do the interview.

—Myles Callum

THE SCOOP



Adbusters

Journal of the Mental Environment

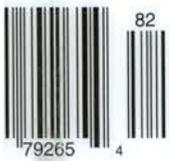
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There are two unstoppable booms that are radically changing our industrial economy into a brave new “network society.” The first boom is in the increasing miniaturization and deployment of computer chips. These chips are finding themselves in car doors, refrigerators, and kids games. Industry folks refer to these miniature, dirt-cheap chips as “jellybeans.”

The second boom is the rise of cheap wireless connections. This paves the way for all the “jellybeans” to talk to each other, creating what *Wired* magazine’s editor Kevin Kelly calls “The dumb power of the network economy.” Dumb, because each jellybean is of limited value, with power connecting it all together.

The utopian spin on the network economy is a connected intelligence. It gives the jellybean-sprinkled soil the power to talk to the farmer; the electric car the power to talk to the road; and your musical shoes the power to sing your favorite tune.

But network economists have overlooked the dumb part. Your shoes may decide to blare music during your job interview, your car may decide to go for a ride without you and your diary may decide to share its secrets through your e-mail.

Spam... Spam... Spam... WHAM!

To: aXle Subject: Girls 4U

To: aXle Subject: Not Your Ordinary Pyramid Scheme

To: aXle Subject: E-mail disruption

It fills up your inbox, it insults your intelligence, it causes havoc on the web. It is called unsolicited bulk e-mail, aka Spam. Spam is the creation of crank advertisers who mail out thousands of e-mails a day to unsuspecting netizens, particularly those in the United States. These junk e-mails require a miniscule feedback to pay their costs and grow bulk e-mail lists. And as the numbers of bulk e-mails increase, so does the toll Internet traffic.

Reports of service disruptions from Internet Service Providers — the people who help us log onto the Net — are on the rise. Most recently, Pacific Bell Internet Services experienced a torrent of Spam, originating from multiple points on the web. The result was a four day disruption in e-mail service for Pacific Bell customers. To cope, the company was forced to install a whopping \$500,000 of new gear to absorb the excess junk mail.

Many network administrators who manage e-mail and news group services have begun to take legal action against SPAM.

The biggest victory to date is a recent \$2 million settlement for Earthlink, an Internet Service Provider. The loser was self-proclaimed “Spam King” Sanford Wallace, a man some estimate

sends as many as 25 million bulk e-mails a day.

At the vanguard of the Spam solution are those who are trying to enact meaningful anti-Spam legislation, such as the Coalition Against Unsolicited Commercial E-mail (CAUCE). You too can help by visiting the Coalition at www.cauce.org.

Stop Biopeep

BioPEEP (Biological Protocol for Enhanced Economic Production) is the project name for a sinister plot that involves the U.S. Military, an unknown multinational and a group of scientists. Its goal is to create human “consumer product junkies” through the distribution of a genetic virus hidden in consumable products such as raisin-supplemented cereal, toothpaste, bottled water, sports drinks and herbal tea.

This plot also includes one Joey Skaggs — the master media hoaxer famous for duping journalists into covering stories “too good to be true.” Skaggs has recently fabricated a web site that exposes the above conspiracy through the files of an ex-BioPEEP researcher. The hoax has already received international news coverage, and the web site has received many visits.

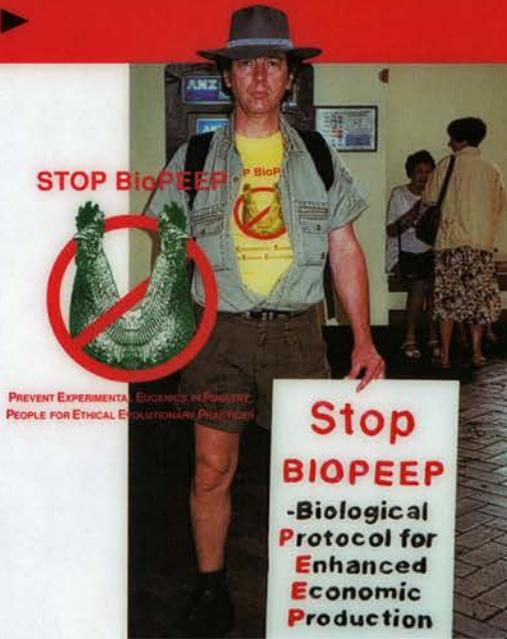
I e-mailed him about BioPEEP. Here’s what he had to say:

“Over the year and a half that I was working on this hoax, reality got weirder and weirder. First, there was Dolly the sheep clone, which I thought might have been a hoax (and it still might be). Then, genetically engineered Brazilian super tobacco plants which American tobacco companies were using in cigarettes appeared in the news. Then Dr. Richard (Dick) Seed announced he planned to clone a human (which should have been a hoax, but wasn’t). Next, the Hong Kong chicken flu virus reared its head. It was a bit spooky. What I was creating seemed to be materializing. Unfortunately, I believe this hoax will be prophetic.”

“The Internet and e-mail have been an integral tool for me. They enable me to communicate with my co-conspirators around the world and enable me to visualize and implement my concepts. But in essence, both the Internet and e-mail are just more avenues for information and disinformation. No one should forget that.”

For the full scoop on Skaggs’ insightful and hilarious history of hoaxes visit Joey’s site at www.joeyskaggs.com. For more information on the sinister BioPEEP project visit www.stop-biopeep.com.

aXle is an avid follower of culture jamming on the web. He is creative director of Public Technologies Multimedia. Please send cyberjamming tips, sites and news to editor@adbusters.org.



Calamity Gene

To the Sven Birkerts of journalism, the tale of Australia's BioPEEP company seemed heaven sent. A BioPEEP employee distraught over his firm's work had quit and leaked information about its planned product: a genetically engineered poultry additive that reconfigures consumers' DNA, addicting them to the substance. Worse yet, the US military backed the project. Around the world, publications picked up the story; *The New York Post's* headline screamed "Zealots Cry Fowl over Flu Slaughter," while *The Australian* weighed in with "Genetic Conspiracy Turns to Fowl Play." Too bad BioPEEP was the latest hoax from New York's notorious prankster, Joey Skaggs.

Along with two public protests and a media-savvy fax campaign, a key element in the BioPEEP hoax was the Web site put up by the "activist group" People for Ethical Evolutionary

Practices. Stopbiopeep.com leaked exhaustive documentation of the cabal's evil plot, including photos of the facility, complicated genetic-coding data, and confidential correspondence between BioPEEP honchos. Skaggs also recruited geneticist Larry Croft and real-life supercomputer jock Miso Alkalaj to contribute to the site.

Skaggs, who has pulled off such deceptions for decades as a way of calling attention both to specific issues and the general gullibility of the press, finally let the cat out of the bag this spring. "The Web is just ripe for these kinds of hoaxes," he marvels. "It has all the ingredients: The gatekeepers are relaxed about facts, the audience seems willing to suspend all critical analysis, and rumor-mongers help spread misinformation. It's profound and great that the Internet can make anyone a journalist, but buyer beware." — Marc Spiegel

High Tech Hoops

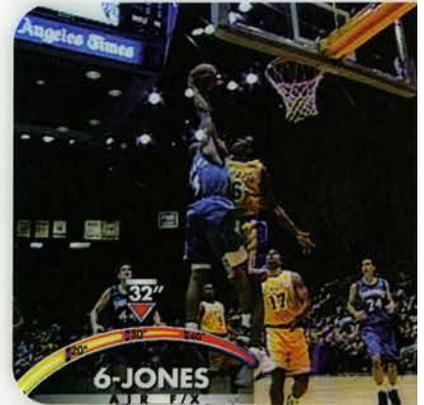
A small team of former Fox TV brass have set out to build the slow-mo replay of the new millennium. SporTVision's high tech broadcast system is coming to sporting events to generate real-time digital effects and computer-aided analysis.

First off the shelf: AIRf/x, a package of four motion-sensing cameras, an SGI workstation, and custom software that measures basketball players' vertical leaps in real time. The system compiles the stats and overlays them on the replay image seconds later. SporTVision plans to premiere AIRf/x in regional markets during this year's NBA playoffs.

SporTVision chief tech guru Stan Honey holds numerous patents related to his work in radar, radio location, and navigation. He invented FoxTrax system, which adds a digital glow to hockey pucks to enhance onscreen visibility and is used by many broadcasters today. Honey admits he never envisioned migrating from navigation-systems design to sports-broadcast effects.

But he relishes the challenges of his new gig: "To compute a graphic 30 times a second, and do that in real time, technically, it's revolutionary."

SporTVision hasn't inked a final deal yet, but prospects look good.



"We hope they come to us first," says Fox Sports's Vince Wladika. Fox must compete with heavy hitters. SporTVision investors include Roy Disney, heir to the Disney-ABC-ESPN empire.

After basketball season, expect effects for baseball, football, soccer, and, of all things, poker. — Joe Nickell

Berlin's Tunnelvision

Subway entertainment need no longer consist of blank stares and shuffled newspapers — Metro Cinevision is turning trains into screening rooms. Its system, debuting this month in Berlin, uses new projection techniques to bring films — and ads — to captive commuters.

Subway Cinema uses 900 single-frame projectors installed in the tunnel wall to project 35-mm film stroboscopically on a screen behind the windows of the train. The flashing film is synchronized with the speed of the train over a length of 600 meters. The result? Thirty seconds of ghostlike 3-D film that appears to hover outside the car — an effect that creator Jörg Moser-Metius describes as "holographic."

The system will debut with 18 films — including Charlie Chaplin shorts — but the more lucrative programming is commercial. Moser-Metius says that several big-name marketers have already signed on.

His next dream is an outdoor system, though the technology has its limitations. "Railways are terrible places," he says. "But we wouldn't use this to hide a beautiful landscape." — Janelle Brown

Torch Song: Paul Cowan on Emma Lazarus (P. 17)

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VOICE

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STAN MACK'S REAL LIFE FUNNIES

JOEY SKAGG'S REMEMBERS

ALL GUARANTEED OVERHEARD

Panel 1: I'VE BEEN A SATIRIST FOR 20 YEARS...

Panel 2: ONCE IN 1966 I DRAGGED A GIANT CRUCIFIX (CHRIST HAD AN ERECTION) INTO SAINT PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL ON EASTER SUNDAY.

Panel 3: IN '68 I MADE A LIFE-SIZE VIETNAM NATIVITY SCENE AND HAD AMERICAN SOLDIERS DESTROY IT.

Panel 4: I TOOK HIPPIES ON A BUS TOUR OF QUEENS. THE PEOPLE WERE OUTRAGED! I OFFENDED EVERYONE IN THOSE DAYS.

Panel 5: BUT IN THE '70s WHEN I PROMOTED A CATHOUSE FOR DOGS, PEOPLE CALLED TO GET THEIR DOGS AND THEMSELVES LAID.

Panel 6: WHEN I ADVERTISED A CELEBRITY SPERM BANK EVERYBODY WANTED TO BUY MICK'S SPERM.

Panel 7: IN '81 I SAID I WAS A PH.D. WHO DISCOVERED A COCKROACH HORMONE WHICH CURED MENSTRUAL CRAMPS AND ARTHRITIS. PEOPLE SAID, HEY, YOU CAN MAKE BIG MONEY WITH THAT IDEA.

Panel 8: I THREW A THANKSGIVING BANQUET WITH A CHILD'S SKELETON AS THE TURKEY - TO ILLUSTRATE WORLD HUNGER. PEOPLE WENT XMAS SHOPPING INSTEAD.

Panel 9: I CREATED A FAT SQUAD TO PHYSICALLY RESTRAIN OVER-EATERS, AND PEOPLE WANTED TO BUY FRANCHISES.

Panel 10: LAST YEAR I BUILT CONDOS FOR UPWARDLY MOBILE GUPPIES. PEOPLE SAID, WE WANT THEM - PRICE IS NO OBJECT?

Panel 11: HEY, PEOPLE, DON'T YOU GET IT? IT'S A JOKE! ON YOU!

Panel 12: ... I GUESS THE JOKE'S ON ME.

CYNTHIA HEIMEL FEELS THE EARTH MOVE: REPORT FROM L.A. (P.43)

BIG CHILL: THE COALITION AGAINST THE HOMELESS (BARRETT, P.11)

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VOICE

**LEONA,
QUEEN OF
THE PRISON
Bastone (P.37)**



REUTERS/BETTMANN

STAN MACK'S REAL LIFE FUNNIES

GUARANTEE: ALL DIALOGUE IN PEOPLE'S OWN WORDS

I CREATED A PRANK ABOUT VIRTUAL REALITY SEX. I PULLED IT IN CANADA AND HOOKED ALL THE CANADIAN AND U.S. MEDIA. THEN I...



... TOOK "SEXONICS" INTO CYBERSPACE. I POSTED IT ON COMPUTER BULLETIN BOARDS AND MONITORED THE ANONYMOUS CYBER-HACKS WITH HANDLES LIKE ZAPP AND "U" TURN.



POTHOLES ON THE INFORMATION HIGHWAY

FIRST THEY FELL FOR IT AND TRIED CALLING CANADA IN SUPPORT OF COMPUTER GENERATED SEX.



THEN THEY GOT SUSPICIOUS. (I ALWAYS LEAVE CLUES THAT WILL LEAD TO DISCOVERY.)



I JACKED INTO TORONTO BUT GOT INTO AN AUDIO-TEXT MENU IN AN ENDLESS LOOP THAT FINALLY LEFT ME LOST IN VOICE MAIL.

AHA! MS. INANO ACITORE REALLY MEANS EROTICA ONANISM!

I WAS DOING ON-LINE ARCHEOLOGY AND FOUND THAT THIS IS A TRICK BY THAT HOAX GUY, JOEY SKAGGS.

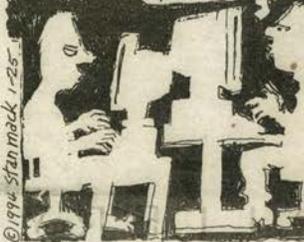
WHY CAN'T ALL COMMUNICATION BE ON-LINE IN LOGICAL ZEROS AND ONES?

BRILLIANT CATCH! WHAT INSIGHT INTO PROCESS!

HE'S IGNORED OUR PROTOCOL AND ERODED THE CREDIBILITY OF OUR UNIVERSE.

THEN THEY BECAME OUTRAGED!

IN CYBERSPACE YOU ARE WHO YOU SAY YOU ARE!



SKAGGS IS A NEANDERTHAL. HE'S THROWING BAGS OF SHIT INTO OUR STREAM AND WATCHING PEOPLE DRINK!



THEY DECIDED TO RETALIATE. THEY KILLED ME.

WE WERE SHOCKED TO HEAR OF SKAGGS' DEMISE. IT'S HARD NOT TO CONNECT IT TO OUR EXPOSURE OF HIM.



HE TRIED TO HOAX US AND GOT WHAT HE DESERVED.

TERMINAL HEMORRHOIDS IS NOT AN EASY DEATH. HE'S LISTED IN OUR OBIT CONFERENCE. IF ANYONE CLAIMS TO BE SKAGGS, IT'S ONLY A HUMANOID.

TO CYBERHACKS, IF YOU'RE NOT ON-LINE, YOU DON'T EXIST. THE STREET WORLD IS NOT REALITY.



VOICE February 1, 1994

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You're Shittin' Me!

Veteran prankster Joey Skaggs covers Rudy with crap

by [Lex Lonehood](#)

Published [December 7, 1999](#) in [Scope](#)

Throwing a wad of elephant dung in Mayor Giuliani's face was a real thrill: the windup, then the pitch, followed by the soft splat. And then the intoxication of seeing the brown-gray sludge dribble off his toothy smirk. Alas, this was only good clean fun; the shit was artificial and the mayor a cartoonish painting. But fakeness is the legitimate medium in which the organizer of this past Saturday's "Doody Rudy" event trafficks. Meet Joey Skaggs, mindfucker: the man who sculpts the media like putty, leaving a trail of hoaxes and provocations spread out over 30 years.

It was high noon in Washington Square Park when Skaggs and his soldiers arrived toting a large canvas tarp

gleaming in the sun. Hanging on poles, the canvas depicted Giuliani 's face on the body of the Madonna, which was painted to mimic Chris Ofili's *The Holy Virgin Mary*, the **dung-laden portrait** that made Giuliani mad enough to pull the Brooklyn Museum's funding.

People paid \$1 per shot to throw the ersatz dung (with donations going to Housing Works, an agency for the homeless). Disappointingly, the crap initially slid off the canvas, as if Giuliani were the Teflon ex-president himself, but the brown slime slowly started to stick, as a beefed-up police force calmly watched from the sidelines. Perhaps the NYPD had decided to tone down their response -- that morning, *The New York Times* ran a story about a police raid on Steve Powers, the graffiti artist who painted the Giuliani /Madonna image. Powers had his apartment

See also...

... by [Lex Lonehood](#)
... in the [Scope](#) section
... from [December 7, 1999](#)

searched as part of an unrelated "vandalism investigation," which coincidentally took place just hours after he and Skaggs appeared on a radio program promoting the dung toss.

Sporting a shit-eating grin, Skaggs was pushing a wheeled recycling bin filled with supposed elephant dung. But the largest contingent of the procession was his orchestra: the swarming media from a multitude of TV outlets, their bulky Betacams obscenely protruding every which way and barking for 30-second sound bites. With no dramatic buildup or megaphone rabble rousing, the event grew a little dull in person, but it played well for the cameras. It was the lead story on some New York TV stations, and all the evening newscasts featured raucous footage of Rudy getting doodied, punctuated with participants' terse bursts against the mayor's policies.

As the event proved, Skaggs is a savvy provocateur, but his true genius lies in foisting hoaxes upon the gullible media, as he has **for the last three decades**. As he became better known as a prankster, Skaggs began giving lectures on the university circuit, but in 1988, when *Entertainment Tonight* invited him to appear on their show for an episode on hoaxes, he sent an imposter who went undetected by them.

Skaggs keeps a complete online retrospective of his hoaxes and their subsequent exposures, documenting works like the hilarious Cathouse for Dogs (1976), where he created phony video footage of a Manhattan bordello for servicing horny dogs; and Cockroach Vitamin Pill(1981) which featured Skaggs posing as a crackpot doctor touting a miracle cure made from ground-up cockroaches.

On the eve of "Doody Rudy," I had the chance to chat with Skaggs about his illustrious anti-career and the current state of prankdom.

GettingIt: Joey, Given your propensity for hoaxes, how do I know this is really you?

Joey Skaggs: You don't. Good question. Now you're safe. We can continue.

GI: Tell me a bit about your methodology and if your work has become more extreme as the media has become increasingly tabloid-oriented.

JS: My work is done on a whole lot of different levels. In some instances we have to create a whole advertising campaign, have it lying around waiting for months or longer before anyone stumbles on it. I'm dependent on other people to help me pull it off. In the Solomon Project there were 25 computer designers. When I did the Cathouse for Dogs, there were 25 actors and 15 dogs. I'm always amazed that I'm able to keep that kind of secrecy for so long and have so many people actually be involved in it.

There's all kinds of art and art has a different meaning for everyone. There's a wall decoration that's nice and there's something that screams at you and provokes you into outrage and hopefully thinking about an issue, whether you accept it or not. That's the nature of my work and that's what I do and I don't think I've had to become more extreme, I just think that I'm surrounded by more people that are extreme but far less creative or thoughtful.

GI: Your fake appearances on TV shows, like *To Tell the Truth* and *Entertainment Tonight*, could be thought of as meta-pranks -- pulling off a hoax on a show whose topic was hoaxes. Have these programs ever offered retractions after finding out about what you did?

JS: No, absolutely not. They don't want to admit their own lack of credibility or their own irresponsibility. Giving it more attention would have a negative effect in their audience's mind. They're not going to want to have to do that unless they feel it's in their best interests to control the spin that they put on it by revealing it themselves. And what I mean by that is they can say this guy is a real sick person. He's a needy person; he needs attention so he does these stupid hoaxes.

GI: Has the Internet changed the way you work?

JS: Well, the Internet has greatly helped me as far as being able to have a central command post and correspond with people in different time zones. I can have international teams like I did with **Stop Biopeep**, with fake companies' correspondence and emails, and all of that because of the computer. It's opened up a whole new world for me.

GI: But has the Internet with its free-flowing mis- and disinformation made people more

skeptical?

JS: I think they are, but we're also just as gullible as we've always been. And I'm good proof of that. I'm still doing it. It's actually wonderful -- it's actually pathetically sad. I have a major hoax out there right now and I've already been enormously successful. No-one even knows it's me.

GI: So that's being perpetrated right now?

JS: It's perpetrated right now. Sooner or later I will reveal it, or someone will stumble on it and put it together and go, "Wait a minute..."

GI: Can you give us a clue as to what it might be?

JS: Fuck, no! *[laughs]* But when you find out, you will die laughing.

GI: Joey, you're a master media manipulator, but how would you react if you found out that you were part of a mind-control experiment and that some of your pranks had actually been fed to you?

JS: That's actually what's happened to me, and I've been faintly aware of that. But now that you mentioned it, it's starting to gel. Oh no! *[laughs heartily]* Thank you.

Lex Lonehood lives in New York and writes for Citytripping.com and Art Bell's "After Dark."

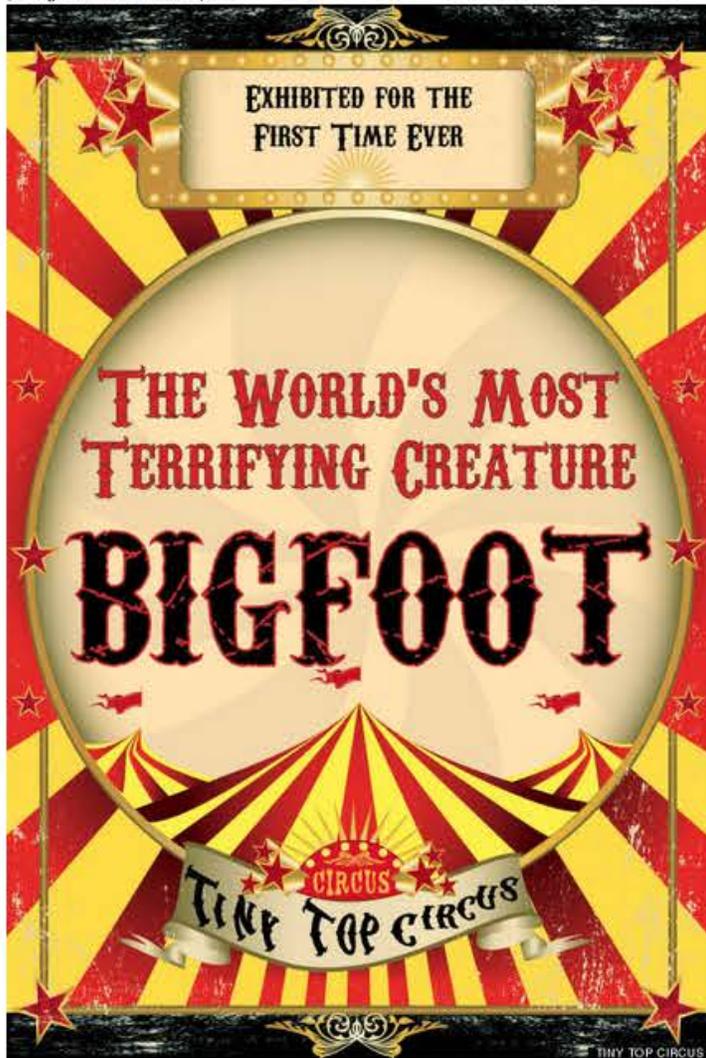
Definitely Real 'Captured Bigfoot' Exhibit Coming To NYC

Is Bigfoot in the Big Apple? Well ...

With Barnum-esque hype, a circus announced that Bigfoot has been captured and will be on display June 7 in New York City.

"For the THRILL OF A LIFETIME come see the strangest creature EVER brought to civilization before he is safely released back into the wild," reads one poster for the event.

(Story continues below.)



An outfit called the **Tiny Top Circus** says it is hosting the public exhibition at Washington Square Park in Manhattan's Greenwich Village. "He is a sight to see," circus rep and **noted hoaxer** Joey Skaggs told The Huffington Post. "You will not want to miss this!"

Skaggs has **pulled a prank or 10 before**. "Give the media a sensational story and they're all over it," he has said.

Oh, Joey, we so wanna believe this time. The elusive and possibly fictional beast has already left quite a **digital footprint** on HuffPost, especially **concerning hoaxes**.

So anyone who shows up at the display might want to heed the words often credited to P.T. Barnum himself: "There's a sucker born every minute."

ALSO ON THE HUFFINGTON POST



MORE: [Weird News](#), [Bigfoot Exhibition](#), [Bigfoot New York](#), [Circus Bigfoot](#), [Bigfoot Circus](#), [Bigfoot News](#), [Bigfoot Sightings](#), [Bigfoot Public Exhibition](#), [Tiny Top Circus Bigfoot](#)

Bigfoot Unveiling Turns Into Huge Toe Job

The Huffington Post | By Lee Spiegel
Posted: 06/07/2014 6:12 pm EDT | Updated: 06/09/2014 1:59 pm EDT



154 27 Follow 1
f Share t Tweet Comment

Ladies and gentlemen, children of all ages, the world's most terrifying creature -- Bigfoot -- has arrived in New York City...sort of.

With little fanfare, we previously warned you -- umm, announced to you -- that the **Tiny Top Circus**, "the greatest and the smallest travelling show on Earth," would present a real Bigfoot in Manhattan's Washington Square Park today.

The long-anticipated moment happened at high noon, with the presentation of, for the first time ever: Bigfoot, a VERY big foot.

[SEE PHOTOS OF THE EVENT](#)



One publicity poster announcing the Biggy event spelled out a variety of rules that the public was encouraged to heed prior to the creature's unveiling:

Proceed at your own risk.
People with heart conditions or those prone to fainting be warned.
No one with serious medical conditions allowed.
All children must be accompanied by an adult.
We are not responsible for any medical or psychological problems resulting from this encounter.
Stand back at least 3 feet from the cage.
Do not touch, pet or feed.
Do not scream.

Prank artist **Joey Skaggs** is the sheer genius behind this latest Bigfoot debacle -- of which there have been many -- but Skaggs takes the concept of "There's a sucker born every minute" to the ultimate degree.

Skaggs circled Washington Square Park in a tiny bigtop, pulled by a tricycle. When the tent flaps came up, there was Skaggs, dressed as a giant foot. The prankster laughed and told the crowd, "If you believe in Bigfoot, you're at least as gullible as people who believe in religion or politics."

And wait! We couldn't help notice something amazing about the look that Skaggs brings to his Bigfoot. The following composite image shows (on the left) the alleged face of Bigfoot displayed by hunter Rick Dyer earlier this year until he finally **confessed it was all faked**. On the right side of this image is hoaxer Skaggs inside that BIG foot costume he just appeared in earlier today. Do you notice any facial similarities here?



To see more authentic images of Bigfoot in his natural habitat -- featuring a toe that looks remarkably like Skaggs -- check out the following slideshow.

Joey Skaggs Bigfoot 1 of 7
Joey Skaggs
Next

We offer some advice to all other Bigfoot hoaxers out there -- **and you know who you are**: Skaggs has raised the bar against which all future Bigfoot bambozles must be measured.

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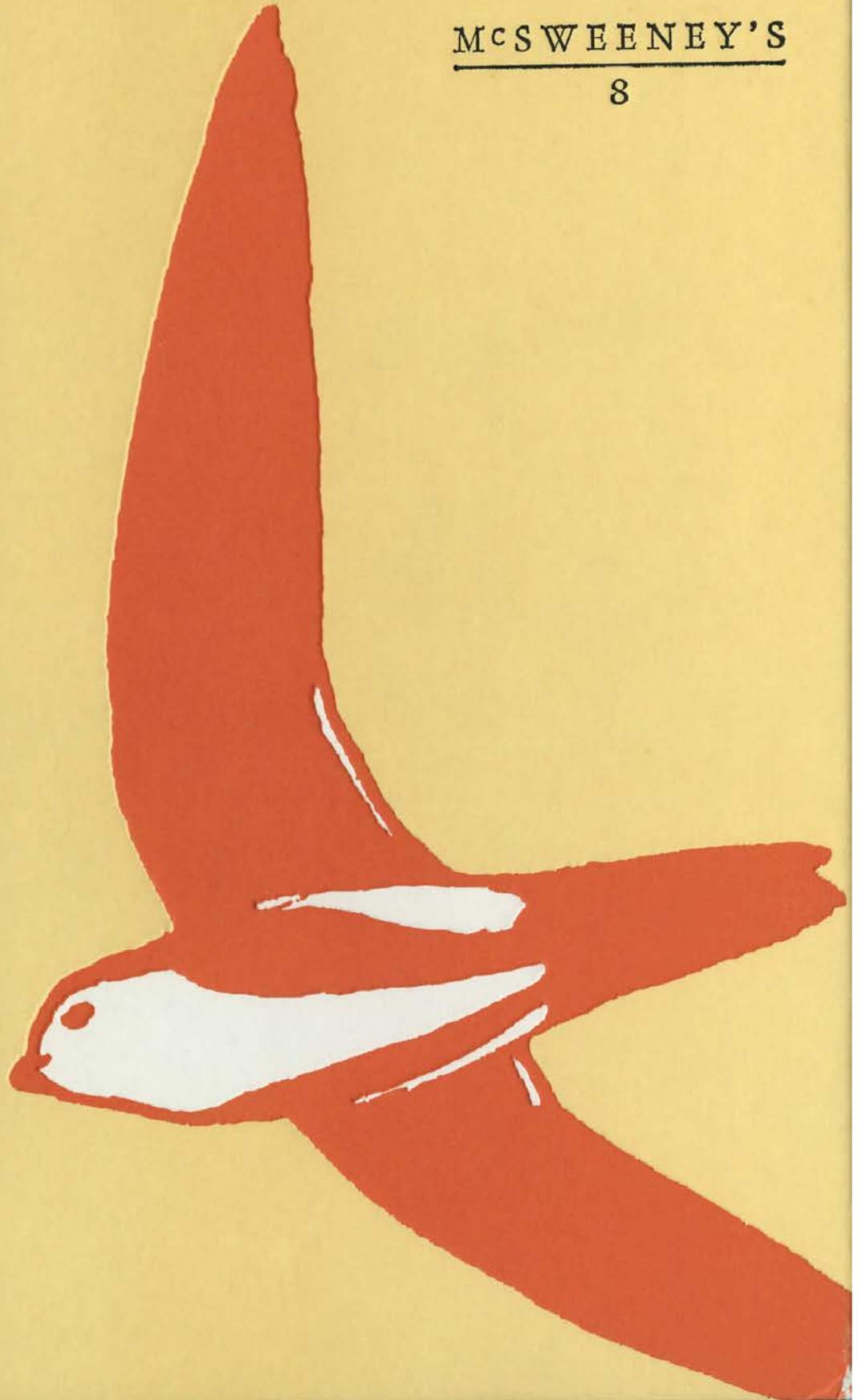
ALSO ON HUFFPOST:

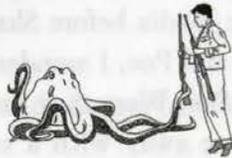
The Legend of Bigfoot Continues 1 of 22

MORE: Bigfoot Hoaxers, Circus Bigfoot, Joey Skaggs Bigfoot, Prankster Joey Skaggs, Joey Skaggs, Bigfoot, Bigfoot New York, Bigfoot News, Bigfoot Public Exhibition, Weird New York, Tiny Top Circus Bigfoot

McSWEENEY'S

8





HOAXES WITHOUT END

AN INTERVIEW WITH JOEY SKAGGS,
ABOUT MAKING UP NEWS

ON APRIL 13, 1844, the *New York Sun* published a special edition, called *The Extra Sun*, on the strength of a front-page story announcing that a hot-air balloon had successfully crossed the Atlantic Ocean. With no fewer than eight exclamation points and a series of bold headlines, subheads, and kickers that filled one-third of the column, the *Sun* trumpeted its astounding news. The balloon had crossed the Atlantic in three days! The “Flying Machine!!!” had just arrived and landed in Charleston, South Carolina. The article promised “full particulars of the voyage!!!” The article, as it happens, was fictional. It was written by Edgar Allan Poe and published knowingly by the *Sun*. New York newspapers were far more numerous then and competition for readers was fierce, and so Poe’s story was a sure-fire way for the *Sun*’s editors to boost their circulation. They were right; the paper sold 50,000 copies of the special edition. Poe was amazed and, even stranger for him, genuinely overjoyed at the enthusiasm that greeted his story. He wrote:

On the morning (Saturday) of its announcement, the whole square surrounding the Sun building was literally besieged, blocked up—ingress and egress being alike impossible, for a period soon after sunrise until about two o’clock p.m.[...] I never witnessed more intense excitement to get possession of a newspaper. As soon as the first copies made their way into the streets, they were bought up, at almost any price, from the news-boys, who made a profitable speculation.

Today, Poe’s fictional news article appears in most of the major collections of his writing, as a story called “The Balloon-Hoax.” His story came to

mind as I was preparing to interview Joey Skaggs, an artist who has, since 1976, made up stories that are the contemporary equivalent of Poe's and managed to get them published in newspapers and on the Internet and broadcast on television and the radio, all without editors and reporters suspecting a thing. Most recently Skaggs created The Final Curtain, a fake company and its requisite web site, promising to do for cemeteries what Walt Disney did for theme parks, and do so tastefully. The company got quite a bit of attention in the media before Skaggs revealed it as his latest hoax. Thinking about Skaggs and Poe, I wondered about the 50,000 people who bought that issue of the *Sun*. Were they just hoodwinked? Was it that simple? Or did they also come away with a story, albeit fictional, about progress, human achievement, and risky adventures, all of which they happened to want to believe in? And could the same be said for those of us fooled by a Skaggs hoax today, or tomorrow?

Q: Now that you've revealed the Final Curtain, I'd like you to talk about some of the logistical nitty-gritty that goes into one of your productions.

A. The Final Curtain took about two years of work from when I first started putting it together to when I released the exposé. Having come up with the concept to satirize the funeral industry, I decided to create a bogus company and web site to promote the concept. I wanted to use the Internet because while fact and fiction are so easily manipulated and blurred, it has also become an ubiquitous and supposedly reliable source for information. It gave us an instantaneous and constant presence, with the illusion of having a history. I registered a domain name and put together a team of volunteers. In this case over fifty people helped perpetrate the hoax—businesspeople, writers, architects, web designers, programmers, ISP providers, and the artists who provided concepts and sketches for their monuments.

We created the Final Curtain web site complete with architectural renderings, a development proposal, biographies for the management team, information about investment opportunities and the time-share program for the deceased, a monument gallery of iconoclastic and satirical grave sites and urns, and a tour of the memorial theme park.

To be successful, this project had to appear completely real. I needed a mailing address, letterhead, telephone business listing, and a staff. One volunteer agreed to let me use his home/office address in New Jersey and we installed a telephone line under the name of Investors Real Estate Development d.b.a. the Final Curtain.

All calls and mail were forwarded to my New York City studio. Our web master created e-mail addresses for all the staff members which were also routed to me. They were real people, but since none had the time to deal with the day-to-day correspondence once the piece took off, I played all the roles.

Then I placed ads in twenty alternative newspapers around the country. The ad read, "Death got you down? At last an alternative! www.finalcurtain.com."

Q: What initial reactions did you get from the ads?

A. As soon as the ads came out, the hits to the site spiked into the tens of thousands per day for several weeks. However, only a few people responded directly.

Q: Then what happened?

A. I let the Final Curtain percolate. Over the next six months, we added artists' submissions to the Monument Gallery. This helped it look as if it had caught on and that more people were becoming involved.

When I felt the site was sufficiently populated with creative, emotionally poignant monuments, I launched a major PR campaign announcing the concept and soliciting artists' monuments for a scholarship program. The winners would receive free 10' x 10' plots for their memorials or urns at one of our soon-to-be-created memorial theme parks.

Q: Satire always seems to require at least some of the audience to completely miss what's funny and accept it as real. Were these very serious, earnest submissions from artists who took the web site at face value?

A. The responses I got seemed genuinely sincere. Some artists embraced the concept and were happy to participate. Others saw it as a business opportunity. For example, one artist who did tombstone engraving for people and pets wanted to put her work up in the gallery as a way to get more work through the Final Curtain.

Q: So next the Final Curtain starts to get early attention from the media.

A. The media response kept me extremely busy granting interviews. I

played various staff members and appeared on radio shows, in newspapers and magazines, on the Internet, and on TV shows. Thankfully no one asked me to come in to the studio.

After an article appeared in the *Los Angeles Times*, the legal challenges began. A lawyer for Uncle Milton Industries Inc., owner of the registered trademark “Ant Farm,” sent a formal complaint to both the writer at the *Los Angeles Times* and our company claiming trademark infringement because one artist’s monument emulated an ant farm.

It pays to have a *pro bono* lawyer friend with a sense of humor. In response we changed the language on the site to “ant habitat,” and all was well with the world again. But I couldn’t pass up the opportunity to stir up a little more trouble. I sent a second press release out about the ant farm controversy to keep the Final Curtain in the news.

Q: I like how the fact that Uncle Milton’s attorneys took the Final Curtain seriously can become justification for journalists just hearing about the Final Curtain to take it seriously, too.

A. When something seemingly adverse happens, I use it as an opportunity. Controversies help to distract reporters from questioning the original premise.

Q: Then what happened?

A. Months went by and I maintained nine-to-five business hours, pretending I worked in a real office. I handled a flood of interviews by phone and e-mail. I had an answering machine with a secretary’s voice on the message, so I could occasionally leave “the office.”

I tape recorded and logged all the calls, and kept track of the articles and stories through print and electronic clipping services. I had to keep everything going long enough for numerous magazines, with very long lead times, to publish their stories.

Q: In order to create a fictional business you had to behave like an actual business. You kept business hours, you held meetings with your volunteers, you did all those standard business things. It’s as if some semblance of reality can’t be imitated accurately without recreating reality completely. Running a business that’s supposed to appear real could even be harder than running a real business.

A. When I create a false reality, I always try to create a plausible structure to help convince people.

Q: When and why did you decide to reveal the hoax?

A. After many months of running this non-existent company I was satisfied with the success of the piece. I composed and mailed an exposé press release. I canceled the auxiliary telephone line and mounted a disclaimer on the Final Curtain web site. But releasing an exposé doesn't mean the piece is over. Since a majority of the media that had fallen for it chose not to do a follow-up and never revealed it was a hoax, many people weren't exposed to the truth. Consequently some serious inquiries continued to come in. Even with a disclaimer on the web site, I receive letters of inquiry, commentary, and offers.

Q: As you watch the news or read newspapers, what do you notice about journalism that you then take into account in your hoaxes? Are there types of stories reporters tend to go for that you then try to replicate?

A. Sometimes it's a matter of being topical and outrageous. Other times you can use a calendar to predict the kinds of stories the media is looking for. Celebrations of anniversaries of disasters, such as nuclear power plant meltdowns or political assassinations provide opportunities, as do holidays. And then there are the ubiquitous animal or pet stories. There's one every day.

Most important to any fake story is a plausible, realistic edge with a satirical twist that is topical. I want people to be amused or amazed but fooled. I want them to say, "Unbelievable!" but believe it. Satire and believability are irresistible to the news media. Sensationalism gets them every time.

Q: Sensationalism is something that people regularly accuse some journalists of. What must be alluring about your hoaxes is that you present journalists with a sensational story. That is, they don't need to cover the cathouse for dogs or the cockroach vitamin pill in sensational ways. They're already sensational. Your hoaxes allow them to be thoughtful, objective journalists while covering something that's completely outrageous.

A. I'm willing to play the buffoon or the wacko and let them laugh at my expense, knowing I'll have the last laugh.

Q: How did you get started doing this?

A. I loved painting and sculpting, but realized how difficult it was for a young artist to be taken seriously by the art establishment. Also, I was impatient. So I began doing confrontational, iconoclastic performances, bringing my artwork into the public arena, like the Easter Sunday Crucifixion in 1966, which started when I dragged a 200-pound ten-foot-tall sculpture depicting a decayed figure on a cross into Tompkins Square Park on the Lower East Side.

These were the early stages of using the news media as an integral part of my work. These performances usually ended up badly for me and anyone associated with me. They were not humorous. I was scorned, chased, and arrested. But I learned first-hand how the news media operates by watching how they interpreted, changed, and misrepresented my intentions.

Q: How did the news media report on those early projects?

A. As a news story, I'm just a subject, not a person. My early performances were provocative, so I was stereotypically portrayed as a counter-cultural figure by the mainstream media. Not much has changed.

Q: Then the media became much more integral to your work.

A. I began to experiment using the media as my medium rather than just a vehicle to report on my performances. I learned more complex ways to manipulate the manipulators, to bring attention to issues about which I felt passionate. My performances became, rather than simple political or social statements, more sophisticated theatrical productions, like the Vietnamese Nativity in 1968, where I constructed a life-sized Vietnamese village in Central Park on Christmas Day and had actors representing American soldiers with weapons attack and destroy it.

I combined advertising art and public relations techniques with theater, film-making, set design, research, writing, character development, acting, photography, and, of course, sculpting and painting. And I added hoaxing to my repertoire, where I would fool the media into believing total fabrications. I called these my plausible but non-existent realities. I was inspired by the need to be cunning enough to fool intelligent journalists, while leaving clues and challenging them to catch me. I'd given up the control a painter might have, but I was dealing with issues, with irony, and with worldwide media attention. It was no longer necessary to have a gallery in order to be seen.

Q: You've written that when reality as reported on the news gets as strange as it sometimes is, "pranks are needed more than ever to jolt us into reexamining our values." What values and what sort of reexamination do you have in mind?

The issues of my performances vary, but most of the questions buried in the work remain the same: What do we believe? Why do we believe it? This is true whether we're talking about questioning the authority of the media or questioning deeper personal beliefs, such as political, religious, moral, or ethical concerns.

My challenge as a satirical artist is how to present ideas to people to enable them to question and reexamine their beliefs. My hope is that my work provokes people to look at things in a new way.

Q: What sort of reexamination do you have in mind for the Final Curtain?

A. The theme is life and death. It's about as heavy as you can get or as light as you can try to make it. Hopefully, the Final Curtain has inspired people to think about how they respond to the death of a loved one. I tried to create an inspirational framework around an absurd premise to jumpstart the process. As it turns out, the premise of a cemetery theme park mall with a time-share program for the deceased may not be that absurd after all. Many people thought it was a great idea.

Q: How reliant are the reporters who write about the Final Curtain on the press releases you feed them?

A. Most reporters who come to me get their stories directly from press releases. Very few do what one would consider to be their professional duty. I count on this to a degree.

If I'm successful in fooling a wire service, I don't really have to do anything else to promote the story, because the media will feed off of itself. They all assume the original author did his or her homework.

The Final Curtain web site contained a lot of information including contacts for the staff. So even if a journalist considered the concept over-the-top, there were people to talk with to get verification. Some journalists did call, which allowed me to have fun elaborating on the concept in order to convince them. Most did not question the premise but would focus on getting clever material for their stories. They asked about the artists' submissions. So I made up answers I thought they'd like.

Q: What sort of questions did reporters ask you?

A. The questions were quite typical. Where did the idea come from? When and where will the first theme park open? Tell us about some of the artists and their concepts. Is there anyone famous? How much will it cost to be buried there?

Q: Did any reporter want to pry into the story a bit?

A. A few journalists dug deeper. Some had questions about the backers and potential investors. But I'd answer probing questions with, "I'm sorry but what you are asking is proprietary in nature and I'm not at liberty to disclose this information." Very few continued to pry after that.

Also, I could always try to manipulate the conversation and feed them other aspects I thought might interest them. I'd tell them we were being besieged by the public, that we were really filling important needs. I'd speak of economic development for the areas in which we planned to build. If it was a radio interview, I knew they wouldn't spend much time. If it was a print journalist I'd ad-lib as long as they wanted. But it was relatively easy to answer their questions and keep them engaged.

Q: Did any reporters contact you, ask a few questions, and then not run a story?

A. A journalist from the *Bergen County Record*, in New Jersey, called several times. Each time he called he tried to dig deeper. Finally he called to say his editor was not satisfied with the information, and he needed more. I told him I could understand the editor's hesitancy since we had not yet broken ground on the first park. And since I couldn't tell him exactly where the first park would open, "for fear that the information would drive up prices of surrounding properties," I suggested he wait until we announced a groundbreaking. He sounded disappointed that his editor was holding him back, but agreed that maybe it was best he wait.

His calls were particularly challenging. The Final Curtain office was not far from his office. I feared he'd take a short trip to our headquarters only to find it was a private home. But he never brought up the subject of visiting us and he never wrote the story.

Q: Before you revealed the hoax, *The Boston Herald*, *Mother Jones*, National Public Radio, and many others reported on the Final Curtain. Have any of

those organizations run retractions or stories explaining the hoax?

A. Disappointingly no. Yahoo! Internet Life, *Mother Jones*, NPR, Fox TV, Associated Press, Flash News, and the *New York Daily News*, etc.—none of them ran retractions. Only the *Boston Herald* ran a retraction, but it was a put-down. And they were joined by the Boston Globe, which hadn't fallen for it. But then, I'd hoaxed both repeatedly.

Follow-up stories by those who have been fooled are rare. When it does happen, it isn't necessarily an explanation, apology, or examination of the issues brought forth by the hoax. They don't want to give the story any more attention for fear of further embarrassment. They don't want the public to question their credibility as an investigative news source.

Q: So your hoaxes typically get more coverage than your subsequent revelation that they are hoaxes?

A. The news media mostly choose to focus on the aspects of the story that concern their having been fooled, not the issues brought forth in the hoax. So the follow-up story is usually an admission that they "among many other journalists" were fooled by a hoaxer. They try not to mention my name. And if they do, they usually put me down. Not that I expect them to praise me.

Q: You ever have any close calls with reporters almost discovering you hiding behind their story?

A. I'm sure, well, at least hopeful that there have been suspicious journalists who, thinking the story was bogus, decided it wasn't worth their time to investigate and let it go. But my experience has shown me that most journalists don't want to screw up a good story with reality, and they will talk themselves out of questioning the story to death.

I remember the first time I fooled *UPI*, this was with my Cockroach Vitamin Cure Hoax. When asked by another journalist for a statement, a *UPI* senior editor said, "The information was correct at the time." I never forgot that. That comment was the excuse he used to justify their incompetence. Incidentally, I've fooled *UPI* numerous times since.

Q: Has the Final Curtain received any media attention since, as the *UPI* editor would have it, the information about it now appears to be incorrect?

A. Even though the site has an exposé announcement on the home page, the site still receives thousands of hits from all over the world everyday. And the servers those hits are coming from keep changing. For example, last week I started getting hits from Poland. So apparently, someone somewhere is writing about it.

Also, I'm still getting e-mails from people interested in financing or mounting their memorial, or offering planned giving opportunities. Obviously people don't read very carefully. If I removed the hoax disclaimer, the hoax would continue on. It would be an interesting test, and I'm tempted to do it.

Q: Your Celebrity Sperm Bank, a plausible but non-existent reality circa 1976, has recently become a plausible, existent web site that auctions model's eggs to the highest bidder. In "Writing American Fiction," Philip Roth wrote, "The American writer... has his hands full in trying to understand, describe, and then make credible much of American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's one meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist." As a satirist, do you ever feel you're in a high-stakes race against reality?

A. Sure, but it also reminds me not to get old or culturally stuck, and not to be disappointed when reality beats me to the punch. It's a wonderful challenge. Not just to keep up, but to guess ahead of the crowd.

Q: Do you consider yourself at all gullible?

A. It is the fool who thinks he cannot be fooled. I hook lots of journalists because of this attitude. Especially Europeans who say, "You couldn't get away with that here." I say, "Excuse me, but I have."

But I'm as susceptible as anyone else. At the same time, I'm highly skeptical. It would make life much easier if I could have total faith and not question everything all the time, but I can't do it and I won't do it.

Q: What would you do if a Joey Skaggs impersonator began making hoaxes in your name, in effect adding counterfeit hoaxes to your real body of fake work in much the same way that van Gogh's oeuvre, say, is today swelled by a number of careful fakes?

A. Are you trying to create more trouble for me here? Actually I thought a lot about continuing my work even after I'm dead. So I've been designing hoaxes that can be executed when I'm no longer alive. For example, hoaxes that my friends can drop in the mail. I actually can still continue working, and no one will be the wiser.

Q: So you might create a hoax that's never revealed, that forever remains a plausible but non-existent reality? That would be a fitting memorial for you, to leave behind some complex, undisclosed puzzles, a bunch of hoaxes without any end.

A. It makes the thought of dying a little more amusing.

THESE THINGS NEVER HAPPEN OVERNIGHT

by CHRIS CALVIN

From a series of letters written by Oakland, California resident Mary Nelson, between February and June 1998. Nelson corresponded with Andy Kessler, Assistant Co-Director of the West Oakland Transit Village Study, a group formed to develop plans for a transit and living center adjacent to West Oakland's Bay Area Rapid Transit station. The letters first appeared in the December 9, 1999 issue of the Bay Area Express, published in Fremont, Oakland.

Dear Mr. Nelson:

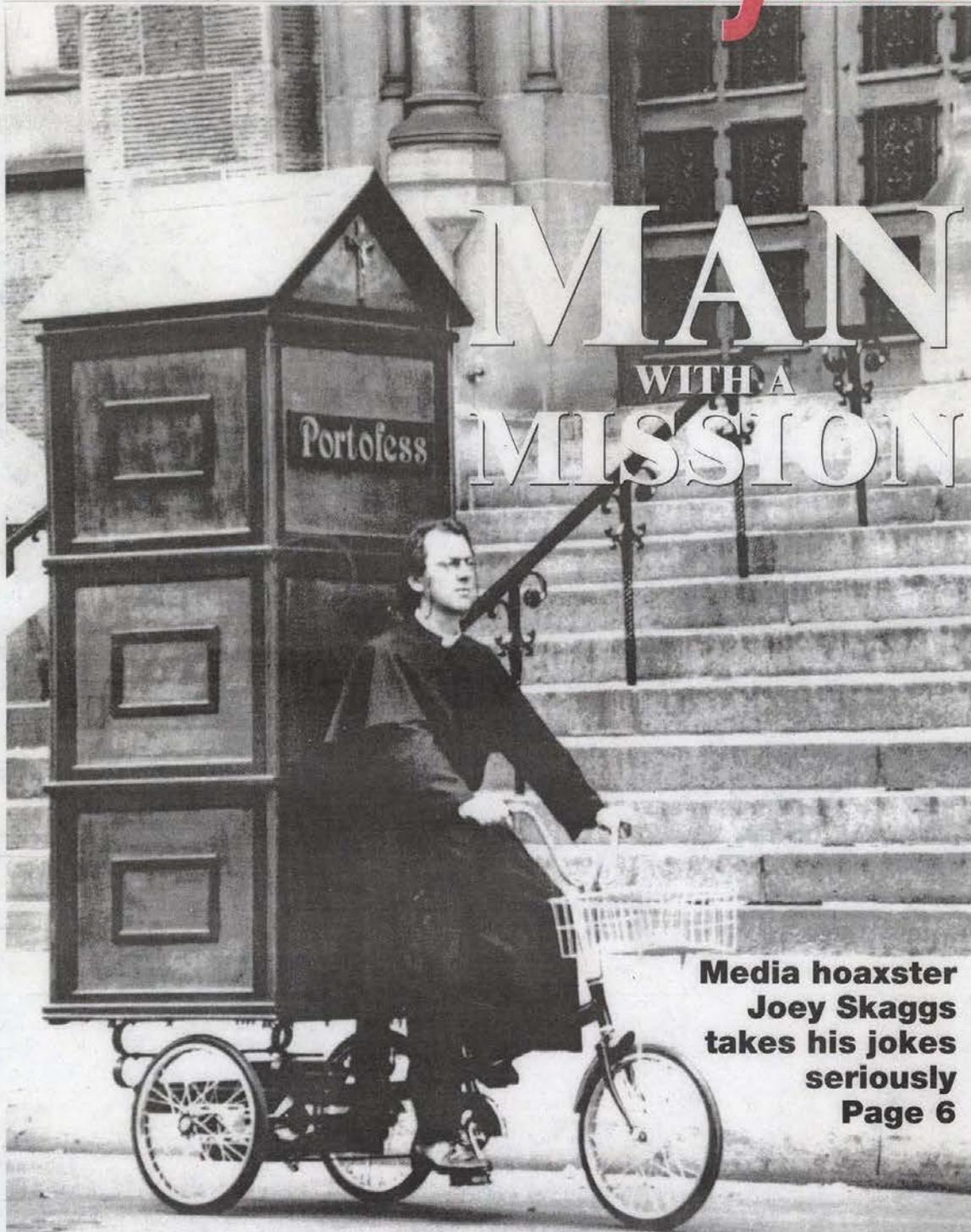
I'm sorry you received two of our firm letters. We've been incredibly busy here, as you can probably imagine, and we don't always have time to reply to each incoming message from whom we love.

To answer your question, our aim is to begin construction by or after July. The Transit Village will be built in installments. We have identified Opportunity Sites (p. 2, fig. 2 on the mailing), and these will be prioritized from the Key Project Area discussed in the mailing. Over the KPAs are underway, renovation of the BART station, and augmentation of the ParkingThorp, will occur. Finally, we will commence construction of the Transit Village Towers.

We are sensitive to the history and needs of the West Oakland community. Notice I say "community." Alternative proposals failed to recognize the various of issues that circulate in the West Oakland neighborhoods. We care to hear those voices, and believe that the growth of the Village will

Phoenix

styles



MAN WITH A MISSION

**Media hoaxster
Joey Skaggs
takes his jokes
seriously
Page 6**

2

**URBAN BUY
Martini
madness**

3

**OUT THERE
Alice K.:
Alone again**

4

**AN OPEN MARE
Drama in the
equine O.R.**

THE MERRY PRANKSTER

WITH HIS MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AND ELABORATE HOAXES, JOEY SKAGGS HAS FOOLED GIANTS FROM ABC TO THE WASHINGTON POST. MEET THE ULTIMATE MEDIA CRITIC.

BY ROB WALKER

All the world loves to see the experts, and the establishment, made a fool of.

— writer Clifford Irving, who once parlayed his claim to have interviewed the reclusive Howard Hughes into a hefty book contract, and later went to jail when the fraud was exposed

THIS PAST SPRING, a physicist called Alan Sokal rocked the academic world and made the editors of a major intellectual journal look pretty silly when they published his gibberish-filled parody as an authentic scholarly work. And the humor magazine *Might*, in an effort to mock the sensational news media, snowed readers and *Hard Copy*, and set news organizations running after

wooden cross up Fifth Avenue to St. Patrick's Cathedral on Easter Sunday, and, as he put it in a 1987 interview in San Francisco's *Re/Search* magazine, "It got media attention. Because of that, I had a sense of my own power." Later, he satirized tourists who gawked at Greenwich Village bohemians by chartering a tour bus full of hippies to observe the exotic lifestyles of the bourgeoisie in their natural habitat, Queens.

But in 1976, his work moved to a new level. Those early brushes with the press inspired him to attempt a different kind of conceptual piece, one that would make it clear that the media were far from infallible — that reporters, in fact, were more than willing to forgo some deep digging in their shameless pursuit

wanted to do was demonstrate that the media aren't the all-knowing institutions they pretend to be. So he has stuck, essentially, to the same formula. First, he concocts a story that he thinks will tempt the media's ravenous appetite while underscoring a larger point about the press's willingness to believe stories that play to certain cultural or ethnic biases. Then Skaggs sends out press releases, gives bogus interviews, and waits for the coverage to roll in. Eventually, he exposes the hoax, usually by way of a press release that makes clear his critical intentions. One recent release reads:

Joey Skaggs coaxes the media into reporting provocative, sensational, sexual, or downright ridiculous stories he has contrived. This affords him a world-wide audience for his elaborate satires. Skaggs forces reporters and the public alike to question and enter into dialogue on issues he perceives to be vital concerning morality and ethics, truth in news reportage, sensationalism, the effect the media has on public opinion and taste, and vice versa. Running through his work is a constant message to both the media and the general public to question authority in all its forms and not to ever trade critical judgment for wishful thinking.

It's a provocative stance. But has it gotten Joey Skaggs into journalism textbooks? Of course not. And that's too bad: if anyone ought to be interested in the Skaggs oeuvre, it's an aspiring journalist. The Fourth Estate, with its power to shape reality, carries the burden of informing the body politic. When a weakness for sensationalism short-circuits the journalistic process, the dangers extend beyond the day's headlines. Sensationalism is an intrusion of media logic into political affairs; it makes people impatient with more complicated and important issues that warrant consideration.

In journalism, though, the bottom line is, there's no more fundamental error than reporting a story that turns out to be a complete fabrication. When Skaggs shows just how easy it is for a reporter's deadline pressures, preconceived notions, and plain old laziness allow a bogus "report" to be generated, he is, in effect, the ultimate media critic.

SKAGGS is not the only person to have fooled the American media, but there is probably no one who has done it so



Fish condos for upwardly mobile guppies. What began in the mid '80s as a satirical commentary on what Skaggs calls "the condominizing of the world" — and on the inevitable evictions made in the name of gentrification — is now a Neiman-Marcus exclusive. The condos, sold for \$5000 apiece, come with all the standard rooms — kitchens, parlors, playrooms — and some thoughtful extras, such as a sushi bar, or a church — "for angelfish," says Skaggs.

a story that claimed former *Eight Is Enough* child actor Adam Rich had died. But frankly, when it comes to making fools of the experts, there is no one like Joey Skaggs.

Skaggs, a lean ex-Brooklynite who favors cowboy boots, is a surprisingly affable artist who has made it his life's work to embarrass the Establishment, and to humiliate the media in particular. "They have a big stake in making everyone believe that they have 'integrity,'" he said matter-of-factly one rainy afternoon at a SoHo café, as he handed over an immense packet of news clippings dating back more than 20 years.

In 1969, Skaggs dragged an enormous

of an apparently hot story.

So Skaggs took out an ad in the *Village Voice* that read CATHOUSE FOR DOGS and announced "a savory selection of hot bitches." And he sent out press releases trumpeting this great new way to reward your dog: get him laid. Potential customers, furious animal-rights activists, and, of course, the press started calling immediately. The local ABC affiliate did a segment. Skaggs finally gave up the truth when he was subpoenaed by the state attorney general. The ABC affiliate, he says, never retracted its story.

The ideas behind that hoax have changed little over time. What Skaggs



Clam fake. Skaggs, as marine biologist Dr. Richard J. Long, holds a geoduck (pronounced gooey-duck), a long-necked clam indigenous to Puget Sound. In response to Japan-bashing in the American media, Skaggs perpetrated what he says was "a thinly veiled penis joke that was anti-Japanese." Claiming that Chernobyl fallout had contaminated the Lapland reindeer, whose antlers (in powdered form) Asians prized as an aphrodisiac, Dr. Long and his "Save the Geoduck" committee protested that the Japanese — and their ravenous libidos — had now begun to favor the geoduck, and were eating it into extinction. UPI, the Seattle Times, U.S. News & World Report, WNBC-TV, and the German and Japanese press got all wet. Six months later, a genuine geoduck-theft scandal erupted.

many times, so effectively, for so long. He sees his work to be a legitimate critique of the entire media process: there is no surer way to mar the news-gatherer's authoritative façade. And because attacking that myth of authority remains his exclusive motivation, he tends to disassociate himself from all other hoaxes — particularly sophomoric stunts like *Might's*. "The most important part for me," he says, "is the intent."

When he protests being lumped in with other pranksters, you have to understand: nobody has a record like Skaggs's, and no hoaxer inspires such vehemence. "He's a schmuck," says one reporter at a major media organization. "What he does proves nothing."

To make things doubly embarrassing for his targets, Skaggs laces his hoaxes with clues that ought to tip off the media. As Dr. Josef Gregor, head of an organization called Metamorphosis, Skaggs touted super-vitamins made from cock-

roach hormones; UPI put the story on the wire. As Joe Bones, he headed the fictitious Fat Squad Commandos, who, for \$300 a day, would pressure dieters to adhere to their regimens; both the *Washington Post* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* wrote it up, and David Hartman assured *Good Morning America* watchers, "Yes, that is his real name." As Father Joseph, he did interviews with story-starved reporters at the 1992 Democratic National Convention about his combination bicycle/confessional — the Portofess, "for people on the go!" USA Today and CBS were among the believers. As himself on *Geraldo*, he planted a fake AP reporter in the audience, who described to the smiling host a prank that never happened, and suggested that Skaggs's ideas be conveyed to every journalism student in the country to teach them to curb their hunger for a good story long enough to put in the research time.

Skaggs has also hoaxed his way onto

Canadian television (as the inventor of a virtual-sex machine) and the BBC (as Baba Wa Simba, practitioner of a new stress-relief therapy that involves roaring like a lion).

Sometimes he even lets activists help him publicize his work. In 1994, he mailed dog shelters 1500 crudely written letters; in them, he claimed to be from a Korean company seeking to turn unwanted hounds into a canned-food product supposedly popular among Asians. The gist of the text: "Dog is good food. . . . Our business getting very big. . . . Dog no suffer. We have quick death for dog." Skaggs put his phone number on the letter and a fake message on his machine — but he never actually got involved in the mechanics of the hoax; he didn't have to. Soon animal-rights groups were demanding investigations, and reporters were using those demands as the basis for a story.

Cover photograph. Skaggs paid an industrial-bicycle company in Ozone Park, Queens almost \$1000 to create the "Portofess," a tricycle-cum-confessional that he rode from Greenwich Village to the 1992 Democratic Convention at Madison Square Garden. Both actors and "real people" came to confess their sins. Sometimes a line would form, and Skaggs, as Father Joseph, would tell the penitent, "I'm waiting for Ted Kennedy." The good father and his invention made the front page of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, which, according to Skaggs, has put him on their shit list.

Continued on page 8

Extremely Tempting

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FRANKSTER, continued from page 7

"Dogs for food?" led the "exclusive" item on New York's WWOR-TV evening news broadcast. In all of these instances, Skaggs argues, he was making points not just about sloppy reporting, but about the media's particular cultural biases, and their sometimes shameful weakness for stories that pander to audiences' worst instincts.

HOAXES as a means of entertainment or pointed satire (as opposed to chicanery) are nothing new. The word "hoax" is derived from hocus-pocus, a nonsense term that was used to lampoon Latin mass in the 16th century. Early media hoaxes — sensational, fabricated stories — generally originated within the media itself and helped boost the circulation of 19th-century newspapers. Such was the case when the *New York Sun* in 1835 reported that scientists had spotted creatures living on the moon. Also from that tradition came Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds*, probably the grandest hoax ever perpetrated on a broadcast audience.

Skaggs's hoaxes are a little different. He's not interested in fooling a wide audience — just the people who are usually in charge of dispensing images and ideas via the media. In fact, Skaggs's work has been described by writer Mark Dery as "culture jamming."

In Dery's 1993 essay in the *Open Magazine* Pamphlet Series, culture jamming refers to media-sabotage tactics. Hoaxes, billboard alteration, pirate radio, and "subvertising" (as practiced in *Adbusters* magazine) are all forms of culture jamming.

Each of these practices owes a debt to Dada, Surrealism, Situationism, and the satirical media stunts of the 1960s that expressed political dissent — throwing dollar bills onto the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, testifying before Congress in an Uncle Sam getup. All forms of authority were being questioned in the '60s, but really it wasn't until the post-Watergate era that the power of the press seemed to approximate that of the government. Investigative journalism took on the fervor of an idealistic crusade, and reporters relished their role as enlightened watchdog.

The fact that so few people were questioning this role in the mid '70s no doubt inspired Skaggs to do just that. Making a mockery of the journalistic method — and, by implication, the ethos behind it — is, according to Dery, "culture jamming in its purest form."

Fast-forward 20 years to one of Skaggs's more recent hoaxes, and you'll find he's still quite active. Late last year there was such national dissatisfaction with the O.J. Simpson verdict, Skaggs says, that it seemed only a definitive answer from some godlike authority could make America feel better. So a press release from a Dr. Joseph Bonuso of New York University was soon issued, announcing that the Solomon Project — a fake NYU project developing a jury machine — had perfected a computer that subjects testimony to "voice-stress analysis" and then spits out a verdict. Skaggs started doing interviews as Bonuso, and ended up on CNN. On the network's World-Wide Web site, Bonuso is quoted as saying, "We found O.J. guilty [of murder] beyond a reasonable doubt." There was also a picture of Skaggs, labeled "Bonuso." In other words, he'd done it again.

Skaggs himself doesn't lack for coverage either, even if he's not a household word. John Tierney, of the *New York Times Magazine*, observed Skaggs's method from start to finish and wrote about the Korean dog-

food hoax after the fact. The *New Yorker* did a similar we're-in-on-it Talk of the Town piece about the Solomon Project this past February. And as the *New Yorker* noted, Skaggs was being followed around at the time by the camera of *Hoop Dreams* director Frederick Marx. The Voyager Company is planning to produce a CD-ROM of Skaggs's work.

Clearly, the man doesn't shrink from the spotlight — but, then, where else could he fight the battles he's trying to fight? Skaggs remains confident that he will continue to get away with his pranks. "People always ask me, 'Don't you think they're going to wise up? Don't they know who you are now?'" He laughs: "They'll just forget me again."

Maybe so. But meanwhile, surprisingly, media professionals do not universally dis-



Hot dog! Chef Skaggs, playing on racial stereotypes, cooked up pooches for a Korean company.

miss him. "It speaks poorly of the way newsrooms work," Columbia journalism professor Rhoda Lipton says of the Solomon Project's success. A producer at ABC for 15 years, Lipton lays some of the blame on shrinking news budgets that reduce the reporter pool even as the craving for more extreme stories grows. Networks, especially, have gradually tightened their news budgets and shifted their resources to more profitable areas; even Walter Cronkite lamented in a recent issue of the *Nation* that news staffs are spread too thin. "I think," says Lipton of news organizations, that "they're taking in people that don't even know what a story is. . . . I don't like what it bodes for journalism in general." Indeed, CNN could have avoided falling for the Solomon hoax with just one phone call to NYU. A CNN spokesman says that after being duped on the Solomon story, the network is evaluating its fact-gathering process to make sure it never happens again.

Paul Friedman, a vice-president at ABC News, was once the victim of a hoax perpetrated by Christopher Buckley, who edits a magazine called *Forbes FYI*. Buckley ran an item claiming his publication had learned "through private channels" that the Kremlin planned to auction off Lenin's corpse. *World News Tonight*, then produced by Friedman, ran with the story — and had to fess up the next night.

Five years later, Friedman still considers that prank less than constructive, but even he concedes there might be a lesson in all this. "I think he's got a point," Friedman says, referring to Skaggs. "Some journalists do cut corners on their way to what seems like a hot story." Echoing Lipton, he points out that researchers are often the first casualties of budget cuts.

"Knowing what I know about how newsrooms work," he adds, "I could pull practically anything."

Rob Walker is a New York-based writer.

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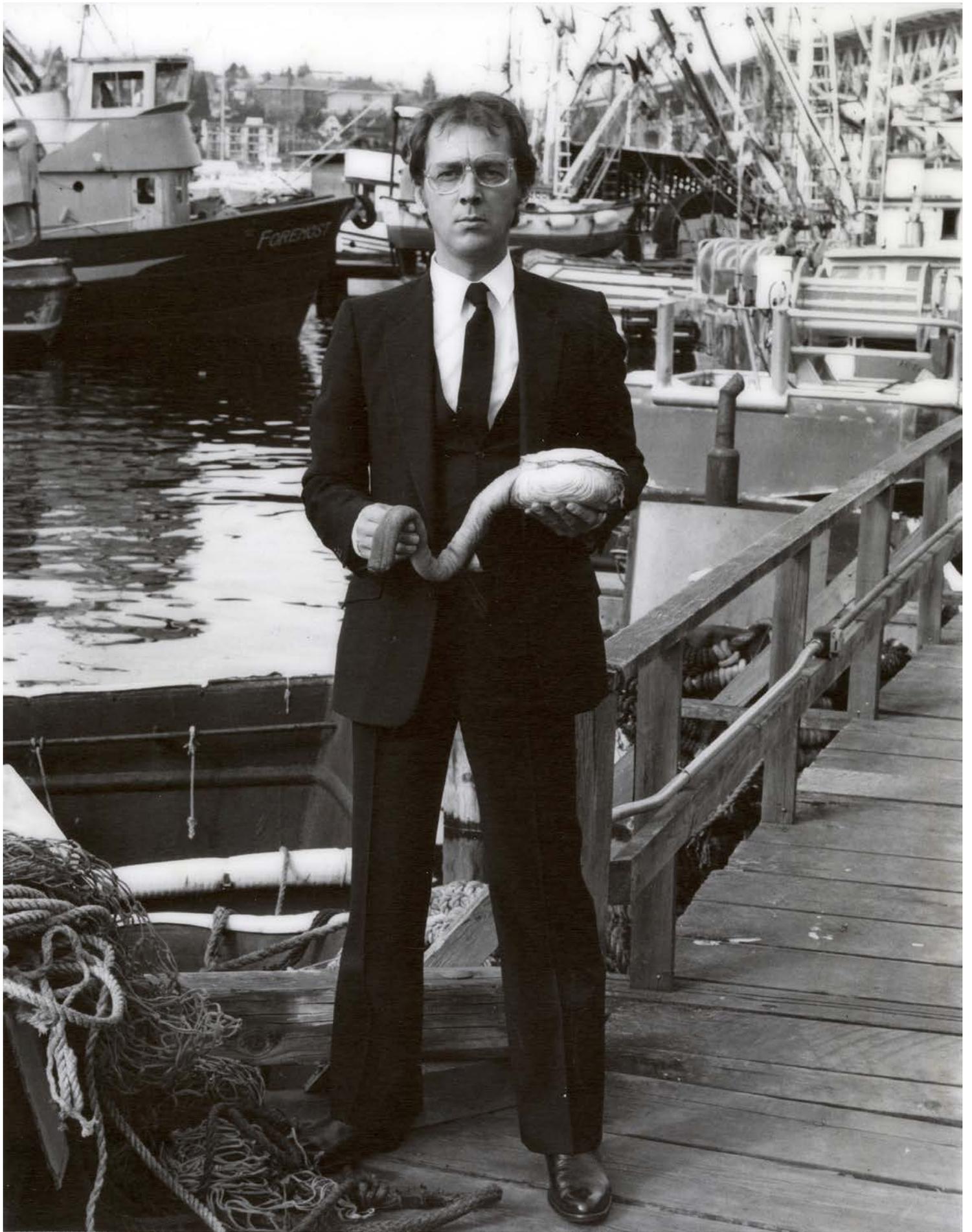
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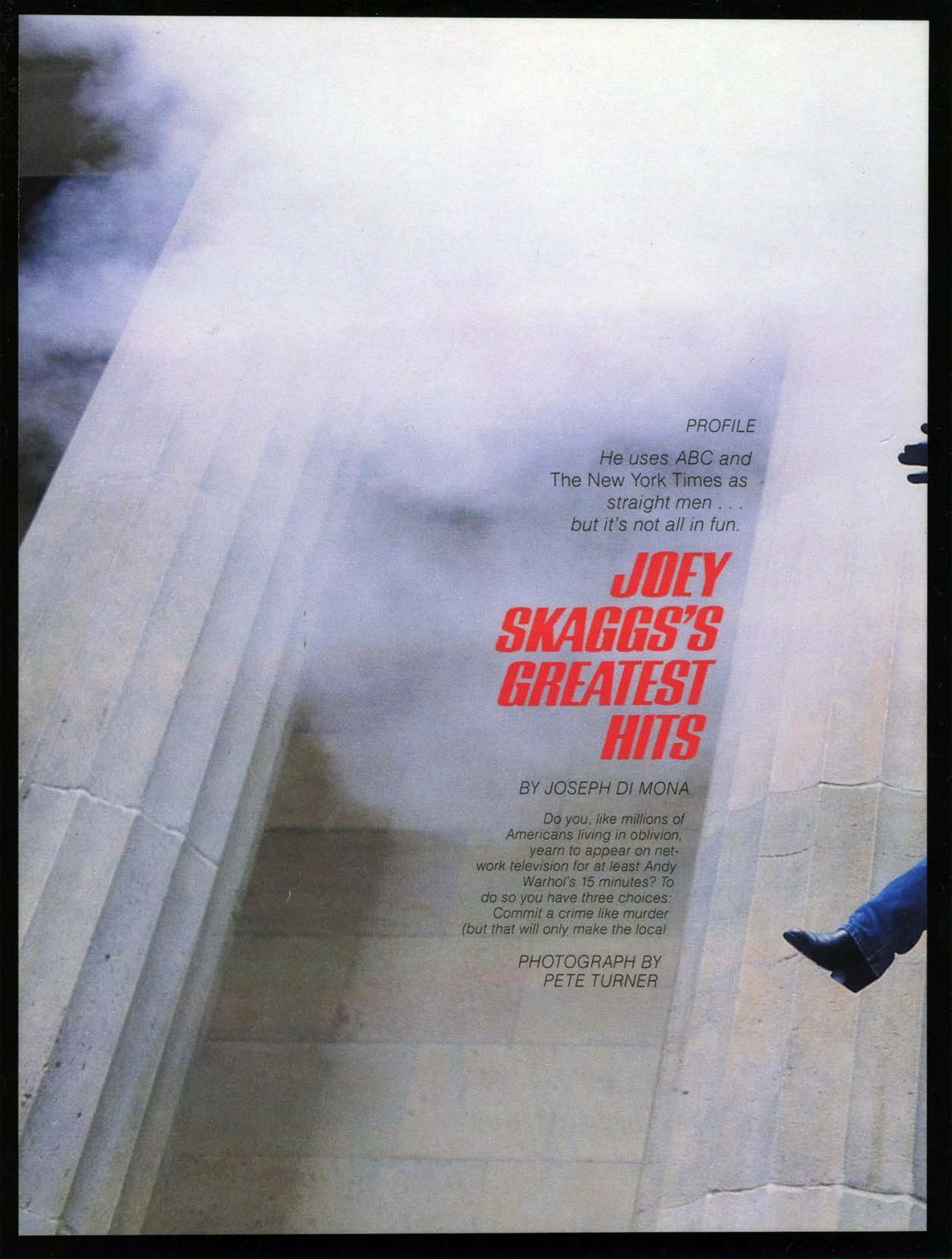
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PROFILE

*He uses ABC and
The New York Times as
straight men . . .
but it's not all in fun.*

JOEY SKAGGS'S GREATEST HITS

BY JOSEPH DI MONA

*Do you, like millions of
Americans living in oblivion,
yearn to appear on net-
work television for at least Andy
Warhol's 15 minutes? To
do so you have three choices:
Commit a crime like murder
(but that will only make the local*

PHOTOGRAPH BY
PETE TURNER



six o'clock news); costume yourself like an idiot and appear on a game show (but that will only be seen by housewives); or option three, emulate Joey Skaggs and produce a series of five-star media hoaxes with actors, props, and stagecraft that will be seen by all Americans on network television and savored in print across the nation as well.

Of course it will help if, like Skaggs, you have a sense of humor. Consider some of the hoaxes that have made him the *bête noire* of both unsuspecting television-news producers and print editors who, believe it or not, reported these stories as straight news: the "Cathouse for Dogs" (a brothel for your pet); the "Fat Squad" (musclemen you hire to stand guard over your refrigerator and tackle you if you approach it); the "Rock Star-Celebrity Sperm Auction" (self-explanatory); the "Sidewalk Commandos" (etiquette teachers for rude pedestrians); the "Bad Guys Talent Agency" (a theatrical agency representing only mean and ugly actors). And there were many, many more media events during a lifetime odyssey that began in the sixties with creative protests against the Vietnam War and continues today as Skaggs plans his newest caper, centering around, of all things, a giant clam.

Who is this man, and why has he devoted so many years to the simple goal of driving the media crazy? Is he on some sort of high-level mission? Or is he simply an exhibitionist, like the chap who dropped out of the sky (option four) on a hang glider into the middle of the World Series? It's a question that brings color to Skaggs's face, and a fist pounding the table. "That's not what I'm about at all. I'm not a party crasher or an exhibitionist either. I produce and stage media events for a *purpose*." But then he smiles. "I'll admit that they're fun."

In short, Skaggs, a lean, youngish-looking man of 42, casually clad in tweed coat, jeans, and boots, insists he is a social commentator, albeit unique. Humorous stunts are his life, and he is quick to describe enthusiastically the comic elements of his future "happenings." But beneath the humor is an anger that sometimes boils into the open, born of a great frustration. No one takes him *seriously*.

I challenge: "How can you treat someone seriously who invents a 'Cathouse for Dogs'?" I am admittedly topped by his response.

"ABC-TV took it seriously. They used it as the major segment of an ultraserious ["Eyewitness News"] documentary on cruelty to animals, not knowing it was a hoax. It was nominated for an Emmy award as the best news show of the year."

Skaggs says that, from the beginning, each of his media happenings had a *raison d'être*. In the sixties it was to make a social statement against one hypocrisy or another, including the Vietnam War. But almost immediately he became a media sensation, and in later years his motiva-

tion encompassed a second goal: to show how the all-powerful media manipulates the news, often without even investigating the facts.

Victimized newsmen have their own word for Skaggs's mission: nonsense. They say that the only difference between him and other exhibitionists is that he has invented a new gimmick that would foil any reporter. He provides the sources for the newsmen to check his stories—and the sources are all friends playing fake roles—so the sacrosanct *Washington Post* Watergate rule of "at least two sources for every fact" goes out the window. In Skaggs's hoaxes, you could end up calling 20 people, even interviewing them on television, and they would all happily confirm Skaggs's "facts" to the puzzled newsmen.

It's an argument that could go back and forth, with Skaggs saying, "If they really investigated the facts, they'd find out it was a hoax in a minute." Implying that

“

The show was a big
success, but all hell broke
loose. The idea of a
"Cathouse for Dogs" enraged
animal lovers,
who called it abusive.

”

they're just too lazy or sometimes blind.

Strangely, *Newsweek*, among other media institutions, agrees with Skaggs on that point and, in doing so, seems to confirm that his hoaxes really do make serious statements—in this case, on the integrity of the press. In the aftermath of the "Fat Squad" story, a lead *Newsweek* article entitled "Skipping Through the News" put it this way: "A lie gets halfway around the world," Winston Churchill liked to say, "before the truth puts on its boots." Churchill never had the privilege of meeting Joey Skaggs, a Greenwich Village media-hoax artist: But the two would have seen eye to eye. Skaggs's shtick is to plant phony stories—bordellos for dogs, sperm banks for rock stars—and see how far they spread. He is never disappointed. In last month's "Fat Squad" caper—a new diet in which strongmen would physically restrain people from food—Skaggs, using the name Joe Bones, appeared on ABC's "Good Morning America." Host David Hartman evidently forgot that a year earlier he had interviewed Skaggs, then using his real name, about his aquatic sculptures, "condominiums for fish." Last week, long after the "Fat Squad" was ex-

posed, Skaggs was still receiving credulous inquiries from reporters worldwide."

Newsweek went on to say that news is often treated with "gullibility and lack of follow-through," and pointed to the exaggerated accounts of death tolls at Chernobyl (the American press said 2,000 had died when only 31 had) and Libya's responsibility for a terrorist attack in Berlin (it turned out to be Syria). Skaggs, it said, had demonstrated the same important point in his prank.

So maybe all of Skaggs's skeptics and critics are wrong. He *is* on to something. Or is he really? A look at his career should be instructive. Skaggs is more than happy to talk about his background.

"I was born in Brooklyn on October 4, 1945, the son of an Italian mother and a Kentucky hillbilly. As a child, I always wanted to become an artist. I went to various art schools, including the High School of Art and Design on 57th Street and Second Avenue, and the Art Students' League, plus a third school which booted me out, and finally the School of Visual Arts, where I got a degree.

"I've always been, and always will be, an artist, first and foremost. I paint imaginary landscapes from large triptychs to miniatures. But early on I found that painting wasn't enough for me. I had other things I wanted to say that couldn't be done through a painting. As a struggling young artist in the sixties, I found a new media: performance pieces. In those days they were called 'happenings' and usually were staged in lofts. I saw hypocrisy and injustice all around me—and I decided to strike out at them."

And so, emerging from art school, he started right in on his secondary career. The time was the sixties. Protest was in the air and on the streets, when Skaggs, an unknown young artist in Greenwich Village, began his stories against "hypocrisy." His very first move shocked and enraged New Yorkers, and brought the police on his head. He created a life-size sculpture of Jesus Christ on a cross, but it was not one that pious Christians preferred to see. Skaggs's Christ was a tortured human, with exposed genitalia. He says the idea was to dramatize the hypocrisy of the Church. But when he is asked to explain how exposing Christ's genitalia accomplished that purpose, he merely looks at you as if you were a religious nut who needed to be pitied.

In any event, his attempt to plant the crucifix on the steps of St. Patrick's Cathedral met with platoons of blue-coated policemen, which only made Skaggs happy. He then turned his attention to the Vietnam War. He constructed Statue of Liberties out of "dismembered baby bodies" and set them up all around Manhattan, where they were quickly pulled down by patriotic policemen.

So far Skaggs had been operating as an individual artist making individual statements, but his next protest was a

turning point in his life. For the first time he produced and staged an event, with actor friends, props, and scenery. Skaggs says, "I built a life-size Vietnamese village. It took months in construction. But on Christmas, accompanied by friends dressed as American soldiers, I hauled it up to Central Park. The village quickly drew a crowd of onlookers. They were a bit stunned when I led an attack on the Vietnamese village with my American 'soldiers,' destroying everything, just as was being done in the real war over there."

It was an inventive and creative protest that would seem to be ideally suited for television news, but went uncovered because of Skaggs's ignorance of media manipulation. In fact, at that time, Skaggs says, "I thought P.R. meant Puerto Rican."

Up until this point in his career his events had gone unreported, seen only by angry policemen and random passersby. And perhaps his future protests would have continued in that fashion, had he had not come up with an idea that put him on the front pages of newspapers across the nation and literally changed his life.

In the sixties, "hippies" were gawked at by tourists who came to Greenwich Village on Sunday afternoons, elbowing each other and snickering loudly when they saw them. Skaggs decided to obtain revenge. Once again he called on his friends, and this time they appeared not as soldiers, but as hippies. Skaggs chartered a Greyhound bus, filled it with

those hippies, and drove off on a sight-seeing mission to point out and snicker at the "squares" of suburban Queens. "I called it my 'Cultural-Exchange Program,'" Skaggs says. "But you should have seen the reaction in Queens. The citizens screamed, 'We're being invaded!' They thought it was fine and normal for them to come to the Village with cameras and point them at long-haired people while they laughed, but when I took hippies to Queens and we all snickered at the squares, they didn't like that. We went all through Queens, with its McDonald's fast-food shops and Bowl-o-Ramas, and we saw the people jogging with paunches, and we laughed at them."

"Well, the next day the Associated Press carried it around the country. The *Daily News* front page ran a huge picture of the bus and the headline 'Hippies Trip to Queens.' And I made my first network television show, when I was interviewed on NBC's 'Today Show.'"

From that point on, there was no turning back. Skaggs realized that his technique of staging hoaxes with actor friends was the only way to break through the seemingly impenetrable barrier between media producers and the common man with a grievance.

But he still had time to raise hell by himself, when he deemed it appropriate. One such moment took place on Wall Street in 1969. Nowadays, with the deluge of news about coke-snorting, insider-trading stockbrokers, Wall Street has

quite a different image than it did in the sixties, when the men of the street were considered stuffy and conservative. Skaggs helped to shock America out of this misconception with the following escapade:

Whenever Francine Gottfried, a humble but comely secretary at a Wall Street firm, would emerge from the subway every morning on her way to work, traffic would come to a stop. With her magnificent breasts and tight blouses, stockbrokers and clerks began to hang around the subway exit just to watch her arrive. Eventually hundreds of Wall Streeters assembled every morning, some standing on automobiles for the simple pleasure of glimpsing—and applauding—Ms. Gottfried on her way to work.

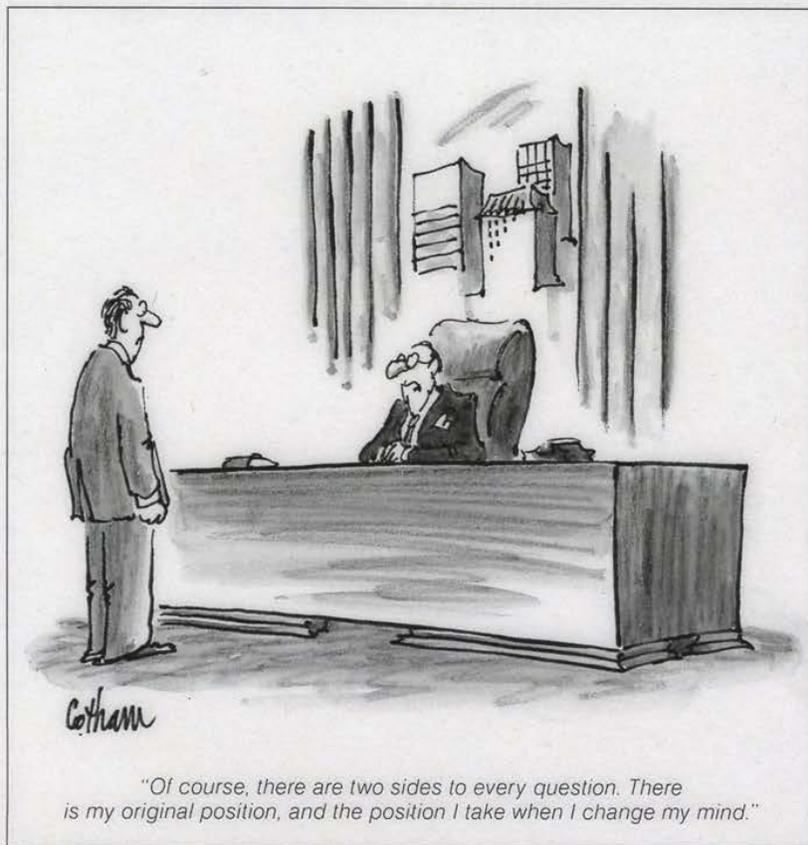
Television cameras filmed the huge crowds, and New Yorkers had a laugh. Skaggs says, "I thought it was funny, too, because it showed the real character of these so-called geniuses who handled hundreds of millions of dollars of our money. They were just horny little guys like you and I. So I decided to give them a real thrill and build the biggest bra in the world, a 50-foot black brassiere with a red heart on each cup for nipples. I first attempted to tie it around the Statue of Liberty, but when I failed at that, I stretched it across the U.S. Treasury Building on St. Valentine's Day. It made quite a sight. And what do you know? The Wall Street workers, now aware of the impression they had made ogling Ms. Gottfried, got incensed, and ripped the brassiere to shreds."

But such individual artistic statements became less and less frequent for Skaggs. By the seventies, his active imagination and his repertory company of unpaid actor friends were ready to propel him into a series of staged hoaxes that have become media classics.

Perhaps no media event symbolized the utilization of all of Skaggs's techniques better than the "Cathouse for Dogs." It began with this legitimate looking advertisement in *The Village Voice*:

CATHOUSE FOR DOGS—Featuring a savory selection of hot bitches. From pedigree (Fifi, the French poodle) to mutts (Lady the Tramp). Handler and vet on duty. Stud and photo service available. No weirdos, please. Dogs only. By appointment. Call [phone number].

Skaggs says he also sent out a press release for his new establishment that stated that if you were embarrassed to come home and find your pooch humping a pillow, or afraid to have guests over because your dog would mount their legs, the "Cathouse for Dogs" was your salvation. "Since there are clothing stores, restaurants, specialty shops, and even cemeteries for dogs," Skaggs said, "[your dog] has all the amenities of life except the one he longs for the most." Now for the first time, for just \$50, you could get



your pooch sexually gratified.

"We told clients we had a wonderful bevy of bitches, and that we used a drug to artificially induce a state of heat into them. Your dog could select any one of the provocative bitches, and she'd be ready for love. Meanwhile, the pet owner could relax, have a drink, and watch the action," Skaggs says, adding that the response was overwhelming. "People were calling from all over to have their pets sexually serviced."

The problem was that there was no "Cathouse for Dogs." It existed only in the ad and the press release. So, Skaggs says, "I decided to stage a 'Night in a Cathouse for Dogs' just for the media. I had to round up not only 30 actor friends, but 15 dogs. And the media was there when we started the show with a beautiful actress holding a saluki hound. The hound and the actress were both dressed in red sweaters and red bow ties. As she paraded in front of male dogs being restrained on leashes by their owners—who were also actors, posing as customers—I, as the emcee, would announce each actress and bitch with nonsense like this: 'This is Debbie and Kara. Kara is a two-year-old saluki hound, with a preference for dobermans. She is not quite a virgin.'"

Skaggs introduced all the bitches that way, then gave a learned lecture on dog-copulation techniques. He recalls, "The show was a big success—but to my amazement all hell broke loose afterward. It seems that the idea of a 'Cathouse for Dogs' enraged animal lovers, who called it abusive. The A.S.P.C.A., the New York City Bureau of Animal Affairs, the N.Y.P.D. vice squad, and all kinds of private organizations came after me, and one of them called me the whoremaster of New York."

WABC-TV heard about the brouhaha and telephoned Skaggs, telling him they wanted to produce a documentary on him and his cathouse in action. But there was no real cathouse, and Skaggs says he certainly wasn't going to try to round up 30 actors and 15 dogs all over again. So he offered them the videotape of the original performance.

To his glee, they used it. In addition, they interviewed Skaggs in Washington Square Park, and then interviewed angry A.S.P.C.A. officials and a famous veterinarian who deplored Skaggs's use of drugs to induce a state of heat in the bitches. (Skaggs, of course, had never used drugs on the animals.) And through it all, WABC-TV producers never realized that the cathouse was a hoax. Instead, they played the story straight on their documentary, making it a key segment in their show, as an example of cruelty to animals. "Not only that," Skaggs recalls, "but the documentary built around my hoax was nominated for an Emmy award as the best news broadcast of the year! And what was my reward? A subpoena from the attorney general for illegally



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maintaining a warehouse for animals. When I brought my actor friends to the attorney general's office and revealed the whole thing was a hoax, they didn't believe us. It was just impossible for them to imagine that the ABC-TV network had been dumb enough to fall for a hoax from a little guy like me." ABC had trouble believing it also, but finally, and reluctantly, withdrew the documentary as an Emmy-award nominee.

But ABC-TV was only one of the media institutions to fall victim to Skaggs. Even the sacrosanct *New York Times*, the newspaper of record, went down the chute when it received a tastefully written press release from a long-suffering ethnic group that had never protested before: the Gypsies. It was signed "Jo-Jo, the King of the New York Gypsies." Skaggs says, "I demanded that the gypsy moth be renamed. I staged a protest in front of the governor of New York's office shouting, 'Rename the gypsy moth!' I had a huge gypsy moth illustrated on my back and an absurd sign which said RENAME THE GYPSY MOTH! on one side, and on the other, GYPSIES AGAINST STEREOTYPICAL PROPAGANDA (GASP). I said, 'Call it the Ayatollah Moth, call it the Idi Amin moth, call it the Hitler moth: We Gypsies have taken enough abuse.'"

The *New York Times*, according to Skaggs, swallowed the story whole, and the *New York Post* gleefully headlined its own story: "Times Falls for the Old Switcheroo." What possessed the *Times* to do so is a little difficult to understand because Skaggs's press release seemed so tongue-in-cheek: "Gypsies Against Stereotypical Propaganda (GASP) are calling for an immediate city-wide work stoppage, asking all New York-based gypsies to halt all palm readings, tarot-card readings, horoscopes, and ESP readings from July 1 through July 7, to protest yet another defaming slur against our character.

"Is it not enough that historically we have suffered ostracism and distrust among the peoples of the world? Have we not suffered at the Hands of the Media, which has labeled us charlatans, hustlers, and thieves? Will there ever be mention of our finer qualities?" This cry for help apparently found a receptive ear at the humane, liberal *Times*, to their subsequent regret.

Meanwhile, on a similar front, Skaggs was engaging another media institution, *Ms.* magazine. What enraged feminists was Skaggs's "Rock Star-Celebrity Sperm Auction." Skaggs conceived the idea when he saw Sperm Banks listed in the Yellow Pages, and went over to take a look at one.

Skaggs says, "I went to the sublobby of a skyscraper. There was a large waiting room with circular seats and cutouts, like those in a bus depot, so you don't have to see the other guy who was there to masturbate and donate his sperm. Through a glass wall I could see the tech-

nicians and scientific apparatus. On the other side of the reception office were the masturbation rooms. A matronly woman dressed all in white who appeared to be a nurse came over and introduced herself to me. I told her my story. I was writing a movie and wanted to have a scene in a sperm bank, but had never been to one.

"She was nice enough to give me a tour of the facility. I was shown the first masturbation room, an eight-by-ten cubicle with a black leather chair, a nightstand with a box of Kleenex tissues, a wastepaper basket, and, get this, pictures of beautiful girls taken from pornographic magazines. I didn't say a word to the nurse because I was trying not to laugh. She took me around to similar rooms, then I asked a question in my most sincere voice. 'Pardon me, but are you allowed to receive assistance?' She hesitated, and then she said, 'No. On rare occasions we have allowed the wife to

I was shown the first masturbation room, a cubicle with a black leather chair, a box of Kleenex, a wastepaper basket, and pictures of beautiful girls.

enter the room, but we only accept manual ejaculation.'

"I was intrigued by the sociopolitical implications of a sperm bank. Surrogate mothers; test-tube babies; gene-splicing; cloning; new life forms; all the religious, legal, and even political issues that would come from technology which challenges and could even threaten morality. So I came up with an idea: Giuseppe Scaggoli's Celebrity Sperm Bank, with 50 actors playing the roles of various people, from teenage groupies to militant lesbians who supported the auction idea because they could become mothers without ever touching a man. And I staged an elaborate auction which eventually made national news. My group of actors was soon enlarged by hundreds of passersby, all excited to be a part of a rock-star sperm auction. And the teenage girls among them were ready to spend every penny their fathers owned, until I announced that all the sperm had been stolen. It almost created a riot."

Once again the media played it straight. Various rock 'n' roll industry publications carried the story as news, including the fact that the sperm had been stolen. But

then the famous Gloria Steinem spoke out on another front: feminism. "On NBC network television she awarded my sperm bank the Earl Butz award for bad taste," Skaggs recalls. "And *Ms.* magazine carried a story on it entitled 'A Star Is (Not) Born,' beginning with this straight news report: 'Celebrity Sperm, a sperm bank specializing in donations from rock superstars, has yet to reschedule its July 24 auction of its product.'"

In 1983 local TV news programs showed a phenomenon that amused New Yorkers. "Sidewalk Commandos" in black uniforms bearing the words WALK RIGHT were patrolling the crowded pavements of New York. The TV news shows played it straight, having received a press release headed by these words: "Walk Right: Pedestrians Demand Proper Behavior on New York City Sidewalks."

Of all Skaggs's inventions, this was no doubt the most popular with the public at large. Says Skaggs, "My vigilante group was an ad hoc committee of concerned citizens who were determined to improve sidewalk etiquette. There were 66 rules. No risqué clothing on fat people. No short persons with umbrellas unless they hold the umbrella a minimum height of five feet ten inches. All joggers must wear underwear. No wearing of sunglasses at night. We sent our commandos on the streets in New York collecting signatures from pedestrians, and all of them loved the idea."

The "Sidewalk Commandos" represented a social statement people liked so much they were sorry when it was revealed to be a hoax. And still another idea was so popular, Skaggs found himself momentarily contemplating becoming rich on it, and forgetting his destiny as a hoaxer. That was the "Bad Guys Talent Agency," the first Skaggs hoax that became a reality. Skaggs had a friend named Verne who, for all of his life, had dreamed of becoming an actor. But, poignant to note, he was ugly and mean-looking. In Skaggs's own words, "He looks like the kind of guy you'd fire from a cannon. Shaven head, fierce mustache, barrel chest. His nickname tells it all: Bulldog." An even more fatal drawback was that he had no acting experience whatsoever. Yet Skaggs was undaunted. He told Verne to go down to the post office and steal a "wanted" poster. Then he recreated one with Verne's photo, placed the name Bad Guys Talent Agency on it, and mailed copies out to all casting agencies.

Within three days, Skaggs had a call from a major casting agency. He accompanied the actor to the office of a bemused agent, who kept saying "fabulous" when he saw Verne. In the middle of the meeting, Skaggs, by prearrangement, socked Verne in the mouth. Verne then leaped across the desk into the agent's lap, growling like a mad dog. Skaggs says, "The agent leapt back six feet, landed on the carpet, clutched his

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JOEY SKAGGS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 148

heart as if he was having a heart attack, then sat up and said, 'Fabulous, fabulous. You're hired.' "

Verne, who had never taken an acting lesson, got a lead role in a feature movie, *The Last Dragon*, and has gone on to fame and fortune as Mr. Clean for Procter & Gamble, and through roles in other major movies. "The trouble was," Skaggs recalls, "that word spread. *People* magazine did a huge picture story on my 'agency,' not knowing there was no agency. And what happened? Hundreds of lunatics called me day and night, all wanting to be Bad Guys. I had creeps lined up around the block, *real* bad guys, wanting to be actors."

And casting agents kept calling. Skaggs found other people jobs. For a while he considered doing it full-time, but then rejected the idea. He still gets jobs for friends, if they're lucky enough to look mean, or at least ugly. Skaggs publicizes them as "Venomous Vixens, Burly Bouncers, and Slimy Sleazes."

Through all of his media events, including his television appearances, Skaggs had somehow avoided real fame (sometimes he wore disguises on TV, as in his appearance as Josef Gregor, the inventor of a cancer cure made of distilled cockroach. NBC's "Live at Five" carried a serious scientific interview with the "doctor"). But the "Fat Squad" caper changed everything, because it was such a phenomenal success. The idea of strongmen in your very own kitchen who grappled with you if you wanted a late-night snack obviously thrilled all women—and TV and print editors as well. The coverage was phenomenal, and in its wake, when the hoax was revealed, articles with pictures of Skaggs were published around the world. Which may cause a problem for him in his career as an anonymous social critic.

To complicate matters, Skaggs is even finding financial success, at long last, as an artist. All of his life he has eked out a living on money he made selling his paintings, which he calls "imaginary landscapes." Now his art has been shown at several galleries, and his sales are more frequent. He is also selling his invention "condominiums for fish," which are aquariums with apartments for "upwardly mobile guppies." And his income is further swelled by earnings as a lecturer on the media.

So will he go straight? Will he stop worrying Dan Rather, Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, and other television luminaries who feel they might fall prey to his next hoax? Don't bet on it. In fact, his next media hoax is aimed at them—and this is fair warning. It involves a giant clam with an enormous penis. There's no way such a hoax can work, and yet. . . . Look out, Dan. **O+**



The **GEODUCK** (Panope Generoso)
Native of Puget Sound, often reaches great
size. Geoduck hunting is a very popular
sport in the neighborhood of
HOOD CANAL—WASHINGTON

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DECKED OUT LIKE A REEL MAN /G5



THE RIGHT TRACK Computers match hikers with trails that best match their abilities/G1

16 STATES RATTLED BY STRONG QUAKE /A2



CLOUDY Tomorrow's high temperature near 70. Fair tonight with increasing clouds tomorrow. Mostly cloudy Saturday. DETAILS, C11

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The Seattle Times

THURSDAY June 11, 1987

WASHINGTON'S LARGEST NEWSPAPER ■ COPYRIGHT © 1987, SEATTLE TIMES COMPANY

Reagan optimistic about arms cuts

Associated Press and Reuters VENICE, Italy — President Reagan said today he believed chances for a superpower summit with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev had increased, bringing improved chances for cuts in nuclear armaments. He told a news conference after the economic summit of major industrial democracies he

was superstitious about making optimistic statements, but added: "At this time I can't deny I believe there is an increased opportunity for a summit conference and an increased opportunity for actual reductions in superpower armaments."

Reagan said the timing of his third summit with Gorbachev was up to Moscow and refused to comment on reports that it might take place in September.

"We have made it plain that they have an invitation and we are waiting for them. We believe they should state what would be the most appropriate time for them," he said.

Reagan noted that Secretary of State George Shultz is in Iceland

Please see REAGAN on A 6



Capt. Glenn Brindel Probe contradicts his version

Stark didn't warn jet until after attack

Ship's captain likely to face court-martial

Boston Globe and Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Navy investigators have learned that the USS Stark did not warn an attacking Iraqi warplane until after the first missile was fired at the ship. The finding was the latest in a probe that sources say is likely to lead to the court-martial or forced resignation of the captain and another officer of the Stark.

The Iraqi plane, a Mirage jet fighter, shot two Exocet missiles at the Stark on May 17, killing 37 American sailors. The Iraqi government has insisted that the pilot mistakenly thought the frigate

was an Iranian ship, and the U.S. government says it accepts that explanation.

A few days after the attack, the Stark's skipper, Capt. Glenn Brindel, said his officers sent two radio warnings to the Iraqi jet a few minutes before the attack. "We give these warnings all the time. And they always heed" them, he said. He meant that on previous occasions, planes have turned away once their pilots realized the ship was American.

However, investigators have calculated, based on information given by personnel who were aboard

Please see STARK on A 7

CLOSE-UP / A3

President Reagan is emerging from the Venice summit with his clout among Western leaders clearly diminished.

Clamscam: Media get conned

Bogus 'save the geoduck' protest was a joke, but UPI isn't laughing

by Dick Clever Times staff reporter

You probably wouldn't guess what Dr. Richard J. Long, Josef Gregor and Joe Bones have in common.

They are all Joey Skaggs, and they have all put the big one over on the news media. The most recent of Skaggs' scams involves Puget Sound geoducks, Chernobyl, Lapland reindeer and aphrodisiacs.

The media hoax artist's latest coup, executed over the past few months, climaxed Monday when United Press International ran the geoduck (pronounced goey-duck) story in its national wire.

The wire service filed the story after a small demonstration by the so-called "Save the Geoduck" committee was held in front of the United Nations Building.

"Our U.N. guy covered it, as he covers all protests there," said a

UPI editor in New York.

The story also went out on the UPI broadcast wire, KIRO radio had a short segment on it Monday night.

Who at UPI could have recalled the wire service's 1981 tale of Josef Gregor and his cockroach vitamins, which also got nationwide distribution? Skaggs played the role of a man who had invented a miracle drug from the ground-up bodies of cockroaches.

David Hartman, in his final days at ABC's "Good Morning America" last winter, introduced a nationwide audience to Joe Bones, who had just launched a radical weight-reduction program called "Fat Squad." For \$300 a day, Bones-Skaggs told Hartman, his staff would physically restrain their clients from eating.

Now comes the "Save the Geoduck" committee.

Dr. Long, a "marine biologist," contends that the Japanese demand for the geoduck (in powdered form) as an aid to sexual prowess is driving the giant clam to extinction.

His "Save the Geoduck" committee brought the problem to the attention of the New York news media Monday at U.N. headquarters, WNBC-TV, in New York, took the bait. United Press International swallowed it. Several Japanese correspondents also filed stories to their newspapers, although they were reported to be perplexed by the group's claims.

The "committee" claimed that fallout from the Chernobyl nuclear disaster had endangered the Lapland reindeer, whose horns (in powdered form) were prized by Asian consumers for their alleged aphrodisiac qualities.

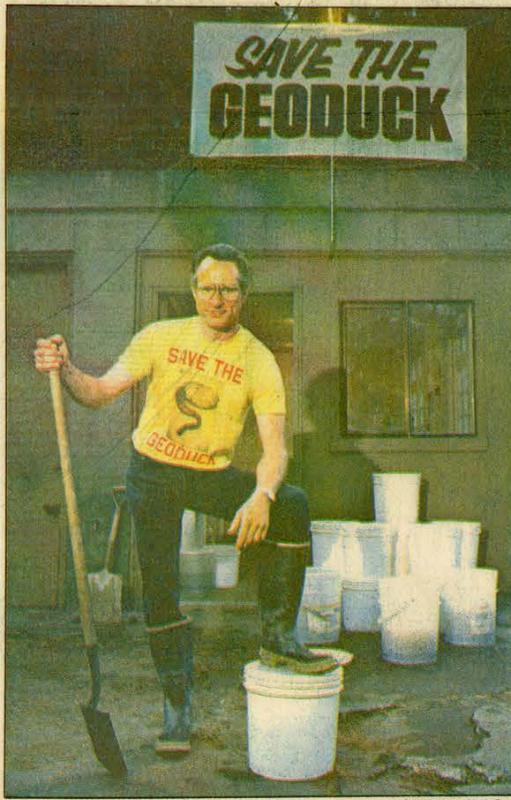
Thus, the bogus committee's release said, "the Japanese and Asian population have had to supplement their voracious appetite for sexual arousing diets with the Puget Sound geoduck. . ."

Skaggs called a Seattle Times reporter yesterday from Honolulu, cackling like a madman. He had told the reporter months ago of his intention to pull off a new media scam using Seattle as its base. However, he refused then to warn the reporter in advance, or to hint

Please see HOAX on A 6



Joey Skaggs as "Dr. Long," with an "endangered" geoduck at Fishermen's Terminal.



Brian Thomas, chairman of "Save the Geoduck," operates out of a small office in Seattle. Thomas wonders why neighbors haven't asked him about the banner on the building.

Panama suspends some civil rights

State of emergency declared after 2 days of massive protests

Times news services

PANAMA CITY, Panama — Facing a general strike by business and labor, President Eric Arturo Delvalle declared a state of emergency early today and suspended eight constitutional rights.

Among the articles suspended were those guaranteeing freedom of expression, movement and assembly, and those that forbid unlawful arrest and set a 24-hour limit on detention without charges.

The strike was called yesterday to protest what wire troops treated demonstrators angered by charges that the 1984 presidential election was rigged.

The protests began Tuesday in response to allegations that the armed forces commander, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega, was involved in the death of former Panamanian leader Gen. Omar Torrijos, helped rig the elections and ordered the 1983 killing of opposition leader Hugo Spadafora.

Retired military chief of staff Col. Robert Diaz Herrera, 49, who made the allegations, claimed Noriega conspired with Gen. Wallace Natting, then head of the U.S. Southern Command in Panama, the CIA and others to plant a bomb on the aircraft used by Torrijos, who died when his plane crashed in 1981.

Diaz Herrera also charged that Noriega helped rig the election that brought Nicolas Ardito Barletta to power.

Diaz Herrera, forced out of the military for health reasons, retracted the charges Tuesday. That did not stop dozens of protests from erupting in the capital.

Troops Tuesday fired tear gas to break up protests by 3,000 in Panama City.

Yesterday, about 5,000 students blocked traffic for hours, protesting and throwing rocks at troops. Soldiers responded with tear gas.

There were no official reports of arrests or injuries. Power was cut off to one of the county's few independent radio stations, which had served as a mouthpiece for leading government opponents.

Compiled from United Press International, Associated Press and Reuters.

Sports teams, 'Peanuts' creator may sue Krishnas

United Press International

NEW VRINDABAN, W.Va. — Major league baseball, several college sports programs and "Peanuts" cartoon creator Charles Schulz are moving toward suing a Hare Krishna community over the group's nationwide panhandling operation.

Attorneys for baseball, the colleges and Schulz say they believe the new Vrindaban community, the largest independently operated Krishna community in North America, violated their clients' trademarks and copyrights. Sources close to the case say suits

probably will be filed within weeks.

Law-enforcement officials, who are pursuing criminal charges, estimate that New Vrindaban collected more than \$6 million from 1984 through 1986 in return for caps, buttons and stickers bearing the registered logos and names of sports teams and "Peanuts" characters.

Many items, manufactured at the mountain community 75 miles southwest of Pittsburgh, carried such words as, "Go Yankees," "Go Tigers," "Go Stanford" and "Go Rutgers." Others depicted "Peanuts" characters Snoopy and Woodstock, including

one with the message: "Eat, Drink and Be Irish." None of the license holders gave permission to the community to use their names or logos. Schulz is said to be incensed that Snoopy was portrayed as what could be a beer drinker.

Investigators say the panhandling operation involved teams of Krishna devotees, dressed in street clothes instead of their saffron robes, soliciting at sporting events. In nearly all cases, the Krishnas did

Please see KRISHNAS on A 7

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President optimistic

REAGAN

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briefing the NATO foreign ministers on the elements of a possible arms agreement with the Soviets that would reduce the number of nuclear missiles in Europe.

Much of the questioning in the news conference — Reagan's first since March — centered on his role in the Iran-contra affair, but the president shed little light on the issue.

Reagan said that he feels a congressional ban against aid to the contra rebels did not apply to him personally, and added that in any event, "I don't think the law was broken."

The president gave a lukewarm endorsement to Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams, who

apparently misled Congress concerning aid to the contras. Asked about an alleged \$300,000 fund to benefit Lt. Col. Oliver North, the former National Security Council aide whom he fired and then called a national hero, Reagan said, "I'm going to wait until he has his day in court."

And Reagan repeated that he never gave anyone orders to assist the rebels during the cut-off in aid, despite the impression left by some witnesses at Congress' televised hearings. He acknowledged that he was aware of efforts by

private individuals to raise money for the contras but said he made no solicitations himself.

Reagan stumbled on one of the few questions that came his way on economic issues, the chief topic on the summit agenda with Japan, Canada and four European industrialized democracies.

Asked about current developments in which the value of the American dollar has dropped over several months, Reagan said, "Well, frankly most of us believe the dollar should remain stable. It could be within reason that there

could still be some lowering of the value in relation to other currencies."

Less than 15 minutes after Reagan had left the news conference, White House spokesman Martin Fitzwater said the president did not mean to suggest that he wanted a further decline in the dollar. "He wants stability in the dollar," the spokesman said.

The president fielded questions in a sun-splashed garden on the island of Gudecca, his home during the summit. He was meeting with European businessmen later

in the day. Tomorrow he heads for West Germany, where he planned a foreign-policy address within sight of the Berlin Wall.

Reagan's question-and-answer session was televised live in the United States during the breakfast hour in much of the country. The president thus began a media blitz to place his imprint on the outcome of the summit and promote the pending superpower arms agreement.

The effort will include his regular radio address on Saturday, a nationally televised Oval Office

speech on Monday and a news conference on Tuesday with reporters based outside Washington.

Reagan was asked why Gorbachev seemed to have a better reputation among Europeans than the president as a man of peace. Reagan replied that Gorbachev was "the first Soviet leader in my memory who has ever advocated actually eliminating weapons already built and in place."

But Reagan said he had made the same proposal, involving dismantling intermediate-range missiles in Europe, four years ago.

'Clamscam' cons media

HOAX

continued from Page 1

at what form it would take.

Skaggs got the idea for the geoduck hoax while on a recent visit to Seattle to appear on KING-TV's "Good Company" on April Fool's Day. During a visit to the Pike Place Market, he was taken by the displays of the long-necked clams at the fish stalls.

"I saw other people respond to it in disgust, or amazement," he said. "I thought, my God, that's a proud clam."

His press release landed on the desk of Times environmental writer Mary Ann Gwinn two weeks ago.

"Puget Sound, Washington State and U.S. national environmental groups are actively planning massive demonstrations and protest marches for this summer to bring attention to the plight of the world's largest clam..." the release said.

Skaggs' friend Brian Thomas, a Seattle architect, was listed as chairman of "Save the Geoduck," with his address and telephone number. Included with the release was a black and white glossy photograph of "Dr. Long," portrayed by Skaggs as a nerdy-looking man in a three-piece suit, his eyeglasses slightly askew, standing somberly on the dock at Fishermen's Terminal, holding a huge geoduck, its neck draped forlornly over Skaggs' right hand.

"My first thought when I saw the picture," said Gwinn, "was: 'This is a joke.' The picture, linked with the contention that the geoduck is an aphrodisiac, seemed too humorous to be real."

"My second thought was: 'There are millions of geoducks.' That assumption was based on stories I'd done on Puget Sound."

Eric Hurbert, shellfish program coordinator for the state Department of Fisheries, confirmed what Gwinn already knew. "There are millions and millions of geoducks," Hurbert said, laughing and stressing his 'm's in the manner of Carl Sagan during his series on the universe on public television. "The geoduck population goes from Puget Sound through British Columbia, through Alaska. They're now finding them in Korea, Taiwan and Japan."

So, there are lots of geoducks. The Japanese don't use the big clam's powdered remains to promote sexual arousal. What's the point, Joey?

"None of my hoaxes would be possible if the media weren't so gullible," he says. "They're lax in checking things out. That's how they get burned."

A UPI editor in New York, contacted yesterday, unfurled a stream of expletives when informed of the hoax.

"A hoax? In what sense?" he demanded.

"In the sense that it is not true. That someone made it up," he was told.

"I hope none of his (Skaggs') friends are New Yorkers," the editor growled. "Because their names go on a list. There's a way to (expletive) 'em one way or the other."

"How would that be?" he was asked.

"Well," he said, after a pause. "There are ways."

Of course, Skaggs has been on the "list" of major national media for years. That hasn't prevented little scams like the Doggie Burdello, the "couthouse for dogs," his \$2,500 "condominiums for fish" project, his celebrity sperm bank or the campaign to clean animals in the name of all that is decent.

Most recent was Skaggs' Second Annual April Fool's Day Parade, which he promoted as an opportunity to march down Park Avenue dressed as your "favorite fool."

Nominees this year were Lt. Col. Oliver North, Sylvester Stallone, Joan Rivers, Ivan Boesky, President Reagan and Nancy Reagan. The joke is, nobody shows up, except for maybe a few people in costume who try themselves the objects of wary looks.

But Skaggs has a dream. He wants to make the April Fool's Day Parade a real event, "celebrate the folly of mankind, to laugh at ourselves."

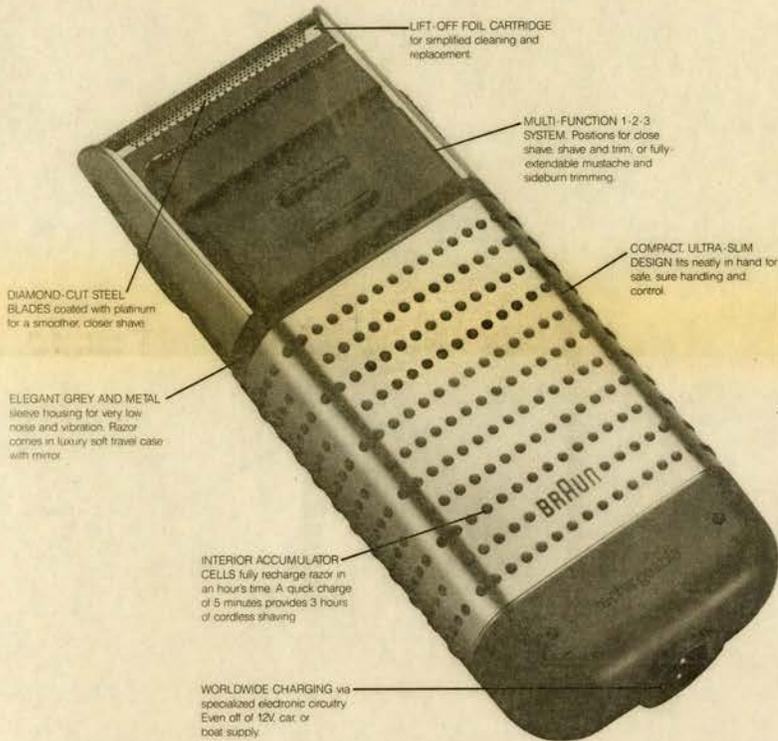
Nobody at UPI was laughing.

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Arts & Leisure

Sunday, December 23, 1990



Jerry Johnson's "Plates," painted on a Brooklyn building in 1985, makes a statement about the technetronic age and its fast-food meals in plastic containers.

The Merry Pranksters And the Art of the Hoax

By MARK DERY

HAVEN'T YOU EVER WANTED TO PUT YOUR foot through your television screen?" asked an actor in "Media Burn," an outdoor spectacle staged in 1975 by the performance art collective Ant Farm. The answer, 15 years later, is a resounding "Yes!" Now, a generation of artists who grew up with television are beginning to rebel against it. Following Ant Farm's lead, they are kicking a hole — metaphorically, at least — in the cathode-ray tube. Some of today's most incendiary artists derive the structure, style and subject matter of their art from mass media. Mordantly funny, frighteningly Orwellian and very much a product of the times, their work challenges the image merchants. Moreover, it constitutes a search for truth in the technetronic age, where, increasingly, perception is reality.

These artists are "cultural jammers," exposing the ways in which corporate and political interests use the media as a tool of behavior modification. Jamming is CB slang for the illegal practice of electronically interrupting radio broadcasts, conversations between fellow hams or the audio portions of television shows. Cultural jamming, by extension, is artistic "terrorism" directed against the information society in which we live.

Mordantly funny, eerily Orwellian, media 'jammers' and billboard artists are challenging reality.

Negativland, a techno-yippie rock band, assembles bits and pieces of advertising jingles, commercial voice-overs and newscasts to make "media about media about media," as one of the group's prerecorded voices puts it. The artist Robbie Conal covers urban walls with the Madison Avenue equivalent of Dorian Gray's portrait — grotesque renderings of Oliver North, Edwin Meese and other political figures whose careers have been darkened by an ethical cloud. The billboard provocateur Jerry Johnson borrows smiling faces and gee-whiz phrases from 40's and 50's magazines to create absurdist ads that resemble the pop art of James Rosenquist in style and the punk cartoons of Gary Panter in spirit. Joey Skaggs tries to hoodwink journalists into covering his elaborately staged, exhaustively researched con jobs.

Mr. Skaggs's art is designed to dramatize the inherent dangers in a media that, according to its critics, accepts photo ops and

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The Merry Pranksters And the Art of the Hoax

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 1990

Continued From Page 1

buzzwords as meaningful discourse. Two weeks ago, he exposed his latest hoaxes: Comacocoon, a cybernetic vacation service with a promotional letter that promised "complete relaxation while your imagination is guided to the destination of your choice" via anesthesia, subliminal programming and computers; Hair Today offered a ghoulish remedy for baldness — scalp transplants for hairless professionals fed up with "camouflage combing . . . or wishful thinking."

Cultural jamming, like 60's Conceptual art, often produces no salable residue; most jammers subsidize their art through 9-to-5 jobs. Mr. Skaggs, who supports himself by selling his paintings and lecturing on communications at colleges throughout the country, observes: "What sets media jammers apart from the art world is that our work isn't designed to make money. It's designed to make a statement."

Geno Rodriguez, executive director and chief curator of the Alternative Museum in Manhattan, offers another perspective. "Some of these media artists are very effective," he says. "Certainly, the idea of guerrilla art, trying to communicate with society at large instead of an elite art group, is timely. In a sense, these pirate artists are the future."

"Unfortunately, some artists who purport to be critiquing the media are actually exploiting it, using it for self-aggrandizement."

While Mr. Rodriguez's assertion may hold true for those whose work has earned them fame in art circles, most cultural jammers will never know the 15 minutes of celebrity augured by Andy Warhol. Walking a fine line between petty crime and Conceptual art, they often labor undercover to make public statements. Their work owes its impact to the anonymity of the artist and the hit-and-run nature of the art. For these reasons, jammers are loath to predict when and where they will strike.

The San Francisco-based Negativland, for example, is set to release a 12-inch single in February that will incorporate the foul-mouthed rantings of a radio personality known for his warm-milk-and-cookies demeanor; to reveal its exact nature could result in legal action that might prevent its release. Mr. Conal has just finished a poster blitz in cities across the United States, plastering walls with unsigned paintings that look radically different from his ear-

Mark Dery is writing a book on the subject of this article, entitled "Cultural Jammers: The Information Society and Its Discontents."

These performance artists are out to expose how corporations can use the media.

lier efforts; publicity, says Mr. Conal, is beginning to undermine his potency as a cultural jammer.

Audio Dadaism For the Computer Age

The term cultural jamming was first used by Negativland in 1984 to describe billboard alteration and other underground art that seeks to shed light on the dark side of the computer age. Not exactly a rock band, not quite a theatrical company, Negativland creates audio Dada whose closest reference point is the Firesign Theater, an avant-garde comedy troupe of the 1970's.

On the cassette "Jamcon '84," a band member observes: "As awareness of how the media environment we occupy affects and directs our inner life grows, some resist. The skillfully reworked billboard . . . directs the public viewer to a consideration of the original corporate strategy. The studio for the cultural jammer is the world at large."

"Helter Stupid," Negativland's latest record, is a nonpareil act of cultural jamming, the aural equivalent of a moustache on the Mona Lisa. A raucous collage of newscasts, interviews and musical fragments, it documents an artful hoax perpetrated by Negativland on the American media.

In 1988, the band stumbled on an article about a 16-year-old boy who butchered his family after an argument, purportedly over the teenager's musical tastes. Inspired, Negativland issued a press release implying that the multiple ax murders were precipitated by "Christianity Is Stupid," a Negativland song that marries the fire-spitting sermon of a Pentecostal preacher to crunch rock of saurian ponderousness.

In the months that followed, the group granted interviews and dispatched communiqués, reiterating that the connection was based on rumor. Numerous hints were dropped in the hope that observant newshounds would sniff them out. During one interview, a tape loop of a voice chortling "It's a monstrous joke" could be heard endlessly repeating in the background. Nonetheless, Pulse! magazine, The San Francisco Chroni-

cle and countless other publications digested the group's disinformation, regurgitating it in article form.

In the liner notes to "Helter Stupid," the group offers insight into its prank: "Negativland chose to exploit the media's eager appetite for particularly sensational stories by becoming a subject they couldn't resist — the latest version of a ridiculous media cliché that proposes that rock song lyrics instigate murder."

Satiric Portraits Of Power Brokers

Robbie Conal and Jerry Johnson work in a similar vein. Mr. Conal, who lives in Los Angeles, paints biting satiric portraits of profiteers and power brokers, adds a punning tag line, runs them off in poster form and, with the aid of volunteers, papers major cities. One work, a cadaverous rendering of the evangelists Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, bears the legend "False Profit." Another portrays a lipless, prune-faced Ronald Reagan framed by the words "Contra Diction." Recently, Mr. Conal rented a billboard in West Hollywood and adorned it with an image of Senator Jesse Helms looking somewhat disgruntled — understandable in light of the fact that his head was impaled on an artist's palette.

Mr. Conal is a guerrilla semiotician who asserts that "art galleries are luxury-item stores, like jewelry stores," in which cultural signs and symbols are bought and sold. With the world as his open-air gallery, he deconstructs popular culture for all to see, unscrambling the media signals with which society is constantly bombarded. "I'm interested in counter-advertising," he says, "using the streamlined sign language of advertising. I combine a stripped-down image with a one-liner to attack politicians and bureaucrats who have abused their power."

Jerry Johnson has been painting ironic murals on a building at the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Nevins Street in the Boerum Hill section of Brooklyn since 1982. His first depicted a 1940's trio in snazzy attire lounging beside a shiny car, accompanied by the admonishment "Dress right . . . and get a better shake out of life." Smaller lettering informed the viewer that the message was "courtesy of the President's Council on Appearances."

Completed during Ronald Reagan's first term in office, it juggled ideas about dressing for success and right-wing politics. "Cash," a 1987 work in which a glassy-eyed woman is shown dreaming of dollar signs and consumer goods, poked fun at the plummeting status of bills and coins in an age of plastic money. In "Plates," from 1985, a chef proffers an egg on a plate. It is a simple gesture that manages to be political, making points about synthetic food and polystyrene containers.

"I started doing these billboards because I had something to say, other than what I said from 9 to 5," the artist explains. "I thought, 'Why not use the existing medium and language in its most classic format to address some of the things going on today?' Billboards are honest. I have real problems with the art world, where someone can paint a painting that makes a condemnatory statement about capitalism and sell it for \$80,000. The artist gets rich and the patron sits on the painting until it appreciates, then dumps it. It's so hypocritical, it's ludicrous."

Coping With Information Anxiety

Ludicrousness, seasoned with savage wit and subversive thought in equal parts, is the tactic used by the Dallas-based Church of the SubGenius to lampoon religious cults, motivational sales programs and other forms of groupthink. Billing itself as an organization for "Scoffers and Blasphemers," the church preaches the gospel according to J. R. (Bob) Dobbs, the smirking, pipe-smoking prophet of sex, sales and slack (slack being a hard-to-define state of SubGenius enlightenment best described as a cross between couch potato and ascended master).

"Pull the wool over your own eyes," the church's literature exhorts. "Relax in the safety of your own delusions." It's a sardonic sendup of a society afflicted with "information anxiety," the post-modern neurosis that results from life lived in a vortex of factoids, trivia and prefab opinions.

Founded in 1979 by Ivan Stang, an underground film maker, the church now claims a paying membership of more than 5,000. Its bible, "Book of the SubGenius" (Simon & Schuster), is in its sixth printing, and SubGenius rallies called Devivals draw large crowds. Clearly, the Church of the SubGenius has struck a chord.

According to Mr. Stang, known to the faithful as Sacred Scribe No. 273, the surreal cult is most popular among information addicts involved in desktop publishing and pirate radio. "This never would have happened if it weren't for Xerox machines," he informs. "There's no telling what will happen 10 years from now, when communications technologies have become cheaper and more sophisticated. I don't think big media is going to take over because small media will always be there. The more they spray, the heartier the cockroaches get."



Waring Abbott for The New York Times

A permanent cure for baldness?—In his latest hoax, *Hair Today*, Joey Skaggs passed himself off to the media as Dr. Joseph Chenango; a friend, Norman Savage, played a scalp donor.



Keith Meyers/The New York Times

Absurdist ads—Jerry Johnson begins his new billboard on the corner of Atlantic Avenue and Nevins Street in Brooklyn.

Sociopolitical Satire As an Art Form

Joey Skaggs — who once convinced United Press International and WNBC-TV in New York to carry his fraudulent claim that hormones extracted from mutant cockroaches could cure arthritis, acne and radiation poisoning — would surely agree. A conceptual cking artist, he is an example of cultural jamming in its purest form.

To Mr. Skaggs, a formally trained painter, sociopolitical satire is an art. "I started doing hoaxes to point out the inadequacies and dangers of an irresponsible press," he said in an interview in the 1987 book "Pranks." "Rather than sticking with oil paint, the media became my medium."

Since 1966, he has been flimflaming members of the fourth estate. He goes to great lengths, he says, to insure that no laws are broken, no innocent victims hurt, by his acts of ontological sabotage. "I don't falsify police reports or take money from the public, and I'm absolutely careful not to hurt anyone," Mr. Skaggs stresses.

"When I did the roach vitamin-pill hoax and sick people called, willing to spend any amount of money, it broke my heart. I said, 'Listen, I'm doing this to illustrate that people who say they have cures for certain diseases are charlatans.'"

In 1976, Mr. Skaggs conceptualized the Cighthouse for Dogs, a canine bordello that offered a "savory selection" of doggie Delilahs, ranging from pedigree (Fifi, the French poodle) to mutt (Lady the Tramp). The Mayor's office was outraged, the now-defunct SoHo News was incensed, and WABC-TV in New York devoted a segment to it that received an Emmy nomination for best news broadcast of the year.

In time, Mr. Skaggs reappeared as the leader of Walk Right!, a combat-booted, black-clad, Guardian Angels-meet-Emily Post outfit determined to improve sidewalk etiquette. In another guise, as Jo-Jo, King of the New York Gypsies, he sported a pair of cardboard insect wings and branched a sign demanding that the gypsy moth be renamed. Many have taken the prankster's bait; in 1982, The New York Times called Mr. Skaggs's fictitious organization, Gypsies Against Stereotypical Propaganda, "a new civil rights group."

There are those who say that Mr. Skaggs and his ilk are not artistic agitpropists but sophomoric troublemakers, or worse. Critics aver that media hoaxes are potentially as disruptive as computer viruses; they posit a situation in which the credibility of the news-gathering network has been undermined.

But Stephen Isaacs, associate dean of the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, suggests otherwise: "When one of these media hoaxers pulls off a stunt, I find it fairly amusing. I don't think it presents a problem. You simply print a corrections column. When you admit error, it makes you more human. There's also the implication that every other fact in your paper is true."

Thomas J. Colin, managing editor of The Washington Journalism Review, adds: "From Piltown Man to fake lottery winners, the media needs to be reminded of its own hubris."

Mr. Skaggs and other jammers are questioning the contemporary world view at a time when the big picture, for most, is made up of video pixels and Benday dots, of white noise and half-truths. Cultural jamming, on its most profound level, is about remaking reality.

"The dominant culture utilizes media to promulgate the notion of the commodity as the highest form of existence," says Stuart Ewen, author of the 1988 book "All-Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture." "Cultural jammers draw upon this cacophony of fragmentary media images. At the heart of their reassemblings is the hope that there could be another kind of world, a world where rather than a devaluation of the human in favor of the commodity, there could be an understanding of the commodity in the service of the human." □

Anatomy of a Hoax

In 1989, while spending a gray winter in Hawaii listening to tourists grump about the weather, the avant-garde bunco artist Joey Skaggs dreamed up Comacocoon, the ultimate high-tech getaway. Floating, anesthetized, in a state of suspended animation, clients would take dream vacations directed by subliminal commands and a "pioneering BioImpression computer system."

Mr. Skaggs produced a glossy, eye-grabbing promotional package, which he mailed to 1,500 members of the press last month. Actresses answered phones in Comacocoon offices (Mr. Skaggs's living room) during business hours, arranging interviews with Mr. Skaggs's alter ego, the Comacocoon director Dr. Joseph Schlafer (German for "sleep").

The good doctor spoke with reporters from the German magazine Der Stern, the BBC, Elle magazine's Paris bureau, The Toronto Globe and Mail, the Italian news-

paper L'Unità and The London Mirror. An interview with Dr. Schlafer and several satisfied "clients" was taped by KYW-TV in Philadelphia for broadcast on its program "Evening Magazine." The New York Times did not try to report on Comacocoon.

Earlier this month Mr. Skaggs held news conferences at which he revealed his deception. "The hoax is just the hook," he says. "The second phase, in which I reveal the hoax, is the important part."

"As Joey Skaggs, I can't call a press conference to talk about how the media has been turned into a government propaganda machine, manipulating us into believing we've got to go to war in the Middle East. But as a media jammer, I can go into these issues in the process of revealing a hoax. Comacocoon has nothing really to do with dream vacations; it's about mind control. I'm making a statement about how easy it is for governments and big business to pull the wool over our eyes." — M. D.

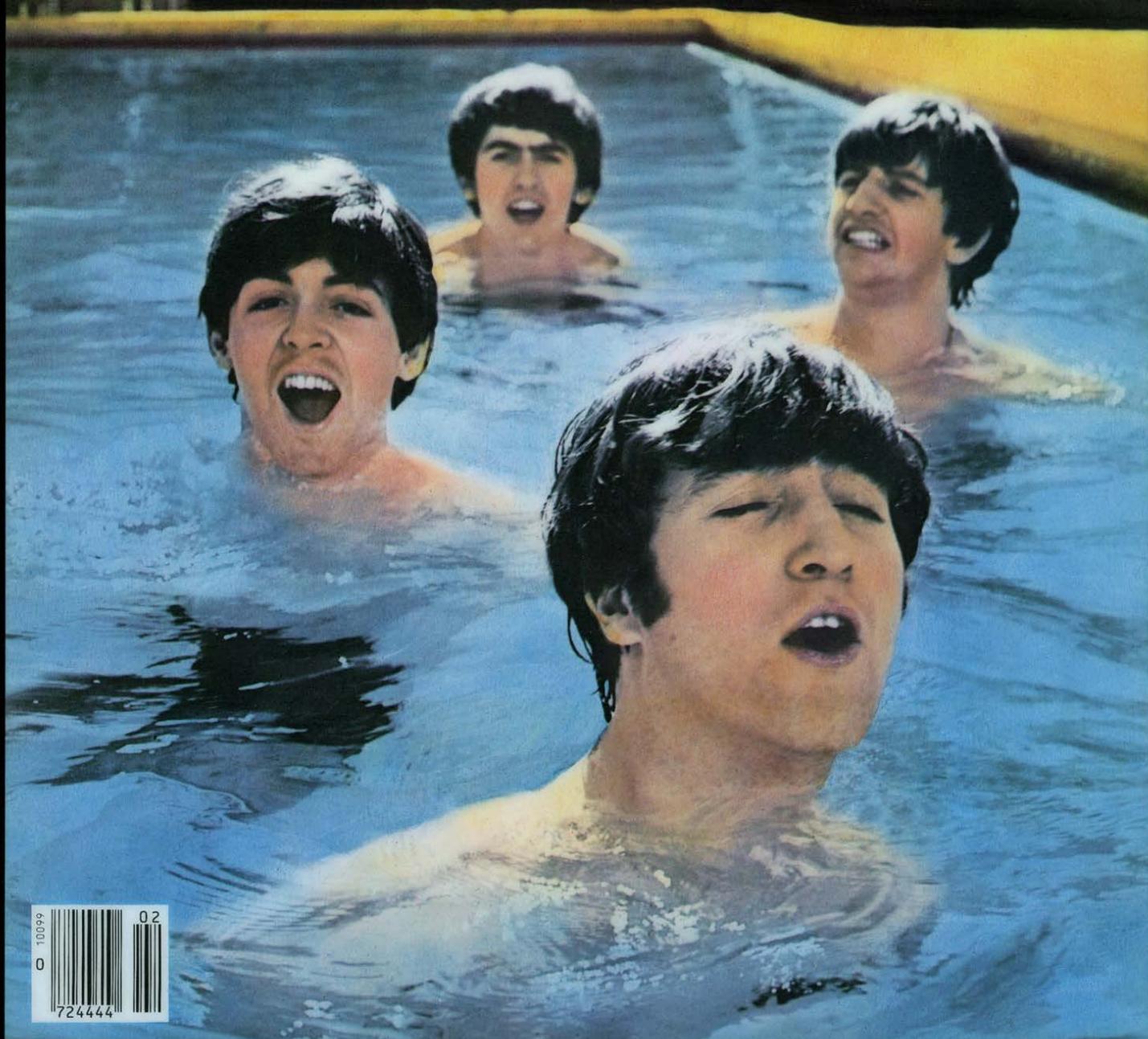
LIFE

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THEY INVADED AMERICA

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DID WE LOVE 'EM?
YEAH, YEAH, YEAH!

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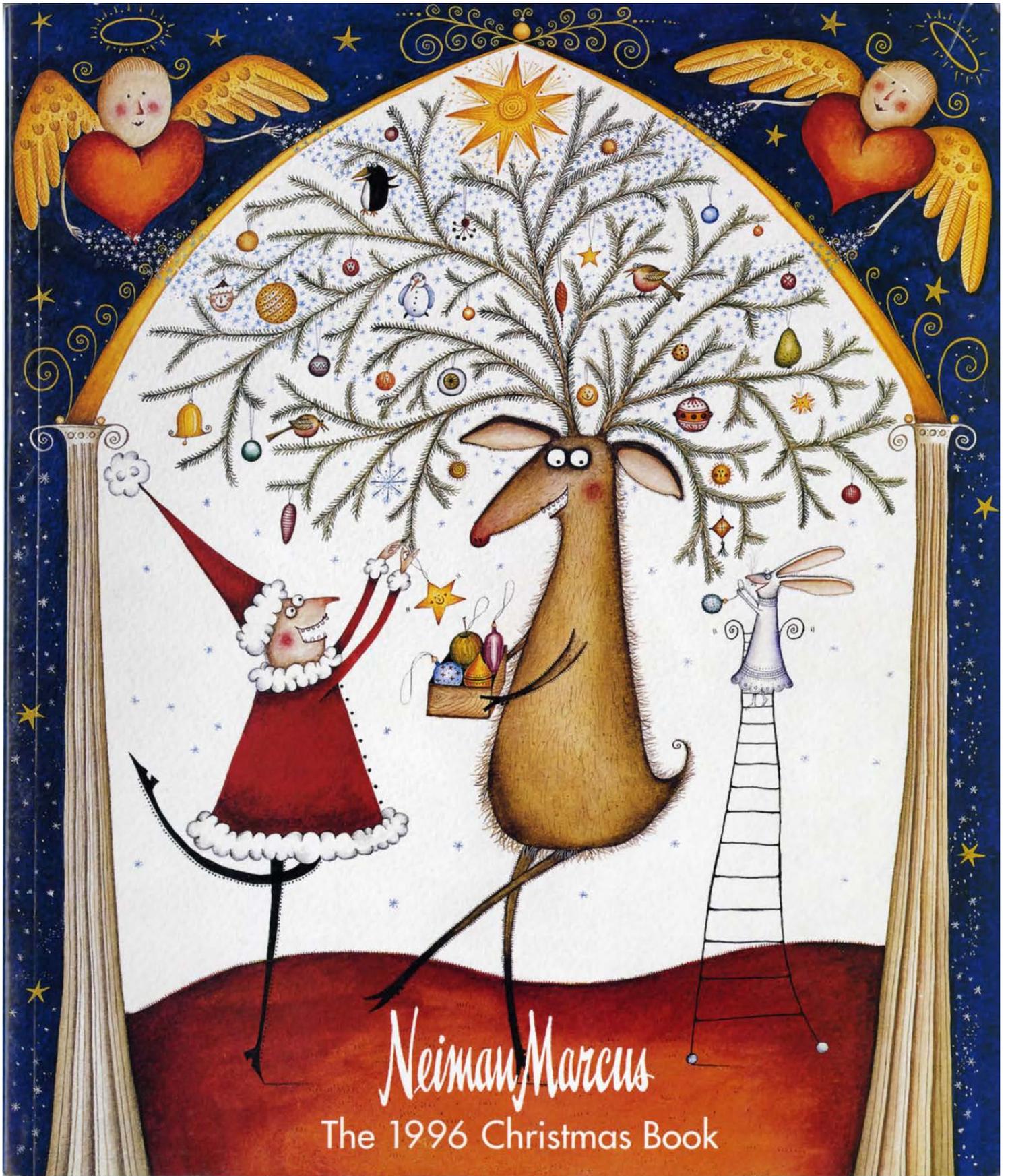


JUST ONE MORE



WALTER BORCE/VISIONS

Tired of fish tanks decorated with ceramic deep-sea divers and turreted castles? Think how the poor fish must feel. To the aesthetic rescue comes Greenwich Village conceptual artist Joey Skaggs, 38, who has created 20 "fish condos," minnow-size still lifes composed of doll furniture and tiny objects made from balsa wood and plastic. On Skaggs's drawing board are a diner, a sushi bar and a church (to be filled with angelfish). The artist, who hopes to mass-market his fish tanks, is selling the prototypes for \$1,500 (fish, like the fancy-tailed guppies and catfish above, not included).



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135A-D From renowned multi-media artist and inventor Joey Skaggs, limited edition Fish Condos — aquariums designed for upwardly mobile guppies. Each is an actual, complete working aquarium depicting a human environment scaled to the size of the fish. These aquatic sculptures have been exhibited extensively throughout the world. Choose from four fully furnished rooms: living room, kitchen, bedroom, or parlor (not shown). Each includes a non-toxic, non-corrosive plastic template of miniature furniture and accessories to fit in a standard 5½-gallon fish tank, and a laminated backdrop of windows, doors, wallpaper, and pictures that adheres to the back of the tank. Low maintenance; easy to clean. Comes with tank, hood light and filter. Fish not included. Call 1-800-825-8000, ext. 6303, for complete information.

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CB/96

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134 Open the translucent paneled shoji doors to enter this simple, unique, and beautifully handcrafted 4 x 8' Japanese-inspired playhouse designed exclusively for Neiman Marcus by renowned artist Joey Skaggs and handcrafted by master woodworker Earl Broglie. Inside, daylight streams in through the front and back shoji screens, illuminating the post and beam wall panels and the exposed open beam ceiling. Sit for tea at the elegant handmade table. Step out the back shoji door and contemplate the world from a beautiful railed deck.

Constructed like a well designed home and built to last, the playhouse is made using fine quality woods and comes with a cedar shingle roof. It has tongue-and-groove construction for the floor and roof. The shoji doors are hung with brass rustproof rollers, and the shoji panels are made of translucent plastic. The interior is sealed with four coats of clear lacquer, and all surfaces are sanded by hand between coatings. The exterior is treated with a weatherproof wood oil stain and requires only an occasional oiling to maintain its beauty and keep the building waterproof.

This durable, weatherproof child's playhouse arrives as an easy-to-construct kit that may be assembled and disassembled with ease. All necessary hardware and materials are included. The only tools needed are a screwdriver and a mallet. The roof comes in one piece and requires five strong people to mount it. For complete information, call 1-800-825-8000, ext. 6303.

134. Japanese playhouse, 10,000.00 (X).

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TRUE TALES OF OF THE GREATEST LIES EVER TOLD!

THE BIG BOOK OF HOAXES



CHAPTER SIX

PRANKSTERS AND SCAM ARTISTS

The difference between a prankster and a scam artist is a subtle one, but the effect it has on those on the receiving end is strikingly different. The prankster seeks to make his victim appear gullible, foolish, or just plain stupid, occasionally making a point about the subject of his hoax at the same time. Joey Skaggs, who starts off this section, is a master of this form of hoax — he considers his schemes not to be simple chicanery, but as performance art. In an earlier time, Hugh Troy had a similar approach — perpetrating elaborate hoaxes, often to expose the pretentiousness of the establishment's view of art.

The scam artist, on the other hand, seeks only monetary profit from his (or, in the case of the Queen of The Lonely Hearts, her) scheme, almost always at the expense of an unwitting victim. Unlike the prankster, the scam artist, while occasionally charismatic, is NOT a nice guy. Whether it's Ponzi, the grand old master of the pyramid scam, or George Parker, the man who profited greatly from the fraudulent (and habitual) sale of national buildings and monuments as diverse as Grant's Tomb and Madison Square Garden, or even quack New-Ager (and resident outer-space alien) Frederick Von Meirers, all the scam artists discussed here sought to first separate fools from their money — and by the time the fools realized it, be long, long gone.

WHAT DO A CANINE BROTHEL, A STRONG-ARM DIET PLAN, AND A VIRTUAL-REALITY SEX MACHINE HAVE IN COMMON? THEY'RE AMONG THE MANY MEDIA HOAXES DEVISED BY NEW YORK ARTIST...

JOEY SKAGGS

WANTED



-FOR-
HOAXES, TRICKS,
AND PRANKS

INSPIRED BY SURREALISM AND ABSURDISM, SKAGGS WAS A PERFORMANCE ARTIST IN THE 1960s. AN EARLY STUNT WAS CARRYING A LIFE-SIZE CRUCIFIX IN THE EASTER PARADE.



HE LED A BUSLOAD OF HIPPIE "TOURISTS" ON AN EXCURSION TO SUBURBAN QUEENS.

--AND HERE YOU SEE A FINE EXAMPLE OF MIDDLE-AMERICAN CULTURE.



A VALENTINE'S DAY SCULPTURE COMMENTED ON SEXUAL FIXATION.

I'M TELLIN' YA, THERE'S A 50-FOOT BRA ON THE TREASURY BUILDING!



SKAGGS MADE THE NEWS, BUT HIS MESSAGE WAS TWISTED AND MISINTERPRETED.

--ANOTHER UN-AMERICAN BEATNIK PROTEST--



SKAGGS SET OUT TO RIDICULE BOTH THE MEDIA'S FAÇADE OF INFALLIBILITY AND THE PUBLIC'S BLIND ACCEPTANCE OF IT.

I'LL USE THE MEDIA AS MY MEDIUM!



FOR HIS FIRST EFFORT, SKAGGS RAN AN AD ANNOUNCING A CATHOUSE FOR DOGS.

--FEATURING A SAVORY SELECTION OF HOT BITCHES." ZOWIE!

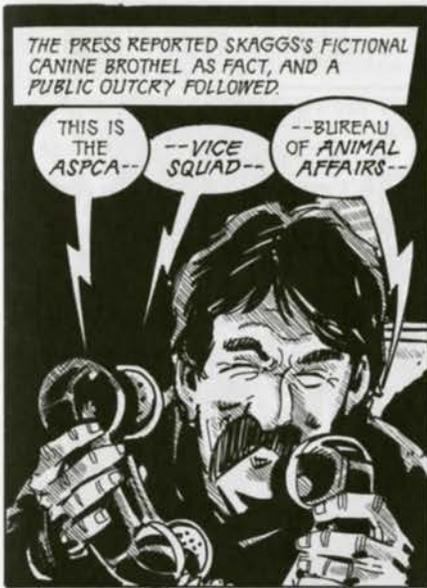
"NO WEIRDOS, PLEASE!"



HE STAGED A PRESENTATION OF THE DOGGIE BORDELLO'S WARES FOR THE MEDIA.

LUBA IS A TWO-YEAR-OLD SALUKI WITH A PREFERENCE FOR DOBERMANS...





THE PRESS REPORTED SKAGGS'S FICTIONAL CANINE BROTHEL AS FACT, AND A PUBLIC OUTCRY FOLLOWED.

THIS IS THE ASPCA--

--VICE SQUAD--

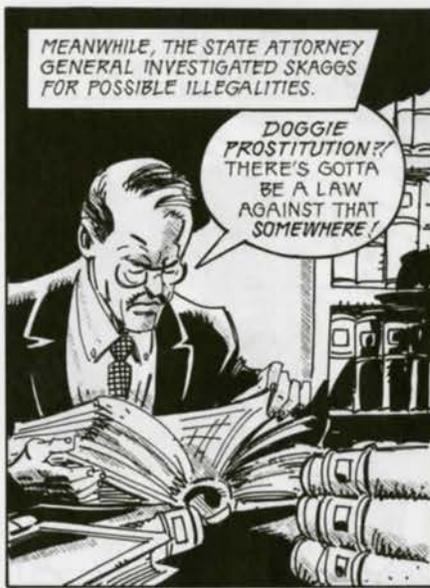
--BUREAU OF ANIMAL AFFAIRS--



ABC NEWS DID A REPORT ON THE CATHOUSE, INCLUDING AN INTERVIEW WITH SKAGGS.

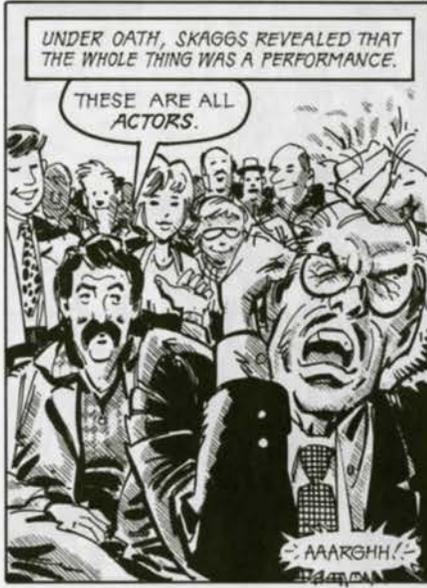
I PLAN TO SELL FRANCHISES. MY SLOGAN IS "GET A LITTLE TAIL FOR YOUR DOG."

THE REPORT WAS NOMINATED FOR AN EMMY



MEANWHILE, THE STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL INVESTIGATED SKAGGS FOR POSSIBLE ILLEGALITIES.

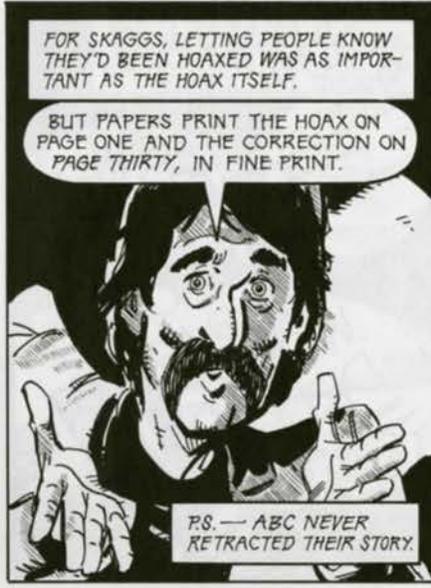
DOGGIE PROSTITUTION?! THERE'S GOTTA BE A LAW AGAINST THAT SOMEWHERE!



UNDER OATH, SKAGGS REVEALED THAT THE WHOLE THING WAS A PERFORMANCE.

THESE ARE ALL ACTORS.

AAARGHH! :-/



FOR SKAGGS, LETTING PEOPLE KNOW THEY'D BEEN HOAXED WAS AS IMPORTANT AS THE HOAX ITSELF.

BUT PAPERS PRINT THE HOAX ON PAGE ONE AND THE CORRECTION ON PAGE THIRTY, IN FINE PRINT.

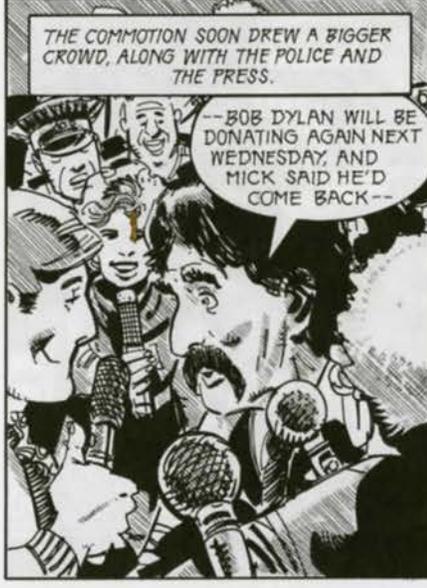
P.S. — ABC NEVER RETRACTED THEIR STORY.



SOON, SKAGGS WAS BACK WITH ANOTHER IMAGINARY BUSINESS VENTURE.

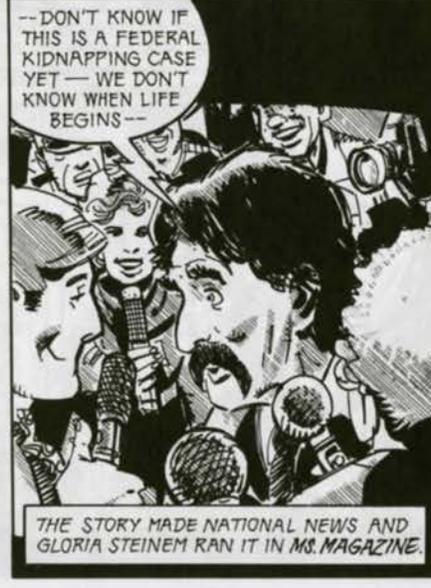
HELP! THE SPERM BANK'S BEEN ROBBED!

HE PLAYED THE PART OF THE OWNER HIMSELF, AND GATHERED 50 ACTORS TO BE ONLOOKERS.



THE COMMOTION SOON DREW A BIGGER CROWD, ALONG WITH THE POLICE AND THE PRESS.

--BOB DYLAN WILL BE DONATING AGAIN NEXT WEDNESDAY, AND MICK SAID HE'D COME BACK--



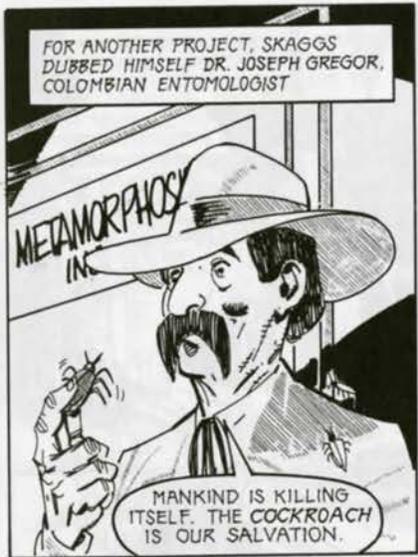
--DON'T KNOW IF THIS IS A FEDERAL KIDNAPPING CASE YET — WE DON'T KNOW WHEN LIFE BEGINS--

THE STORY MADE NATIONAL NEWS AND GLORIA STEINEM RAN IT IN MS. MAGAZINE.



SKAGGS CALLED HER PERSONALLY TO TELL HER IT WAS A HOAX

OH! WELL, NEXT TIME YOU'RE DOING ANOTHER THING, LET ME KNOW!



FOR ANOTHER PROJECT, SKAGGS DUBBED HIMSELF DR. JOSEPH GREGOR, COLOMBIAN ENTOMOLOGIST

MANKIND IS KILLING ITSELF. THE COCKROACH IS OUR SALVATION.



SKAGGS SPENT \$3000 TO EQUIP AN AUTHENTIC-LOOKING LAB, WHERE HE HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE.

I HAVE BRED "SUPER ROACHES," IMMUNE TO TOXINS—AND EXTRACTED THEIR HORMONES TO MAKE A VITAMIN



ACTORS PLAYING PATIENTS TOUTED GREGOR'S "MIRACLE DRUG."

I'VE BEEN TAKING ROACH HORMONE PILLS FOR A YEAR. IT'S CURED MY COLDS AND FLU.

AND I'VE GOT NO MORE ZITS!



VERY INTERESTING, DR. GREGOR.

I'LL WRITE UP YOU AND YOUR ORGANIZATION, METAMORPHOSIS.

REPORTERS MISSED SKAGGS'S ALLUSIONS TO KAFKA'S "METAMORPHOSIS" IN WHICH GREGOR SAMSÄ BECOMES A GIANT INSECT



THE STORY WAS PICKED UP BY UPI AND RAN IN PAPERS AROUND THE COUNTRY.

IT WAS MONTHS BEFORE UPI PRINTED A HALF-HEARTED RETRACTION.



ANOTHER HOAX BEGAN AS A SCHEME TO HELP A FRIEND GET AN ACTING JOB.

I'LL PRETEND TO BE YOUR AGENT. YOU LOOK TOUGH—I'LL CALL MY AGENCY "BAD GUYS, INC."



MY BOY DON'T NEED TO AUDITION, SEE!

GRRRRR!

FABULOUS! HE'S HIRED!

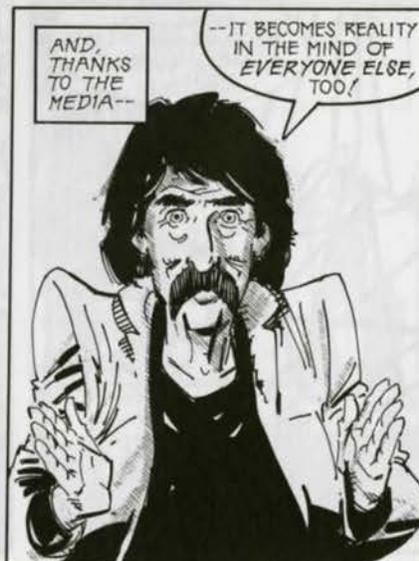
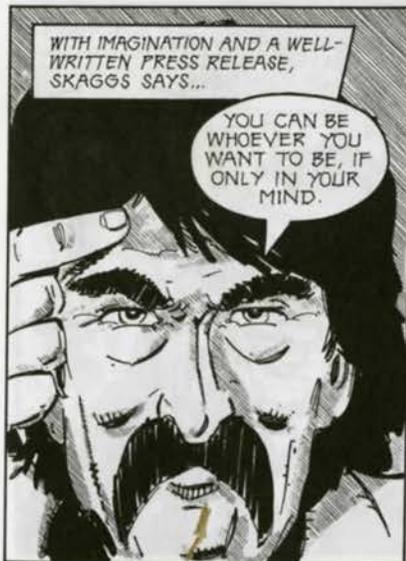
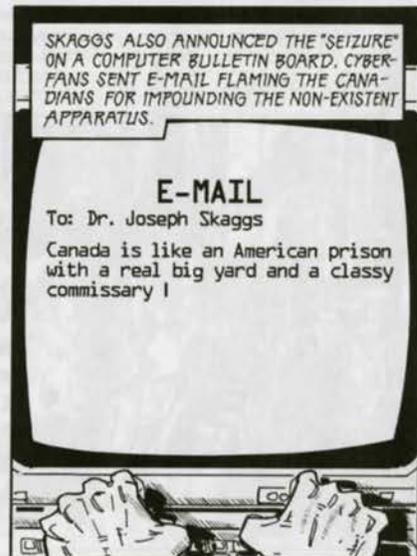
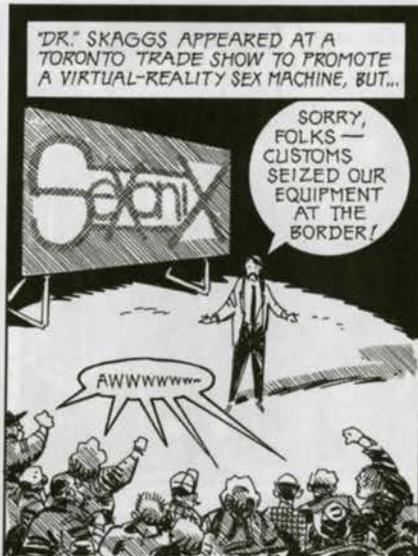
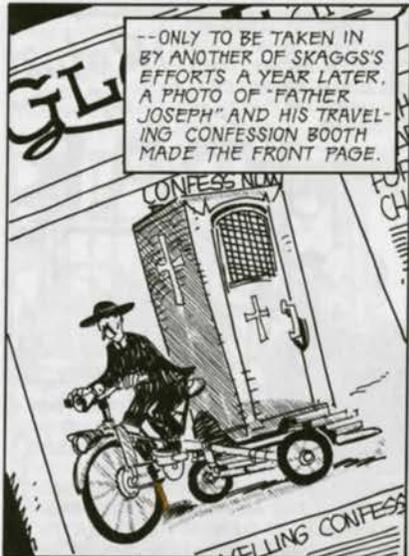
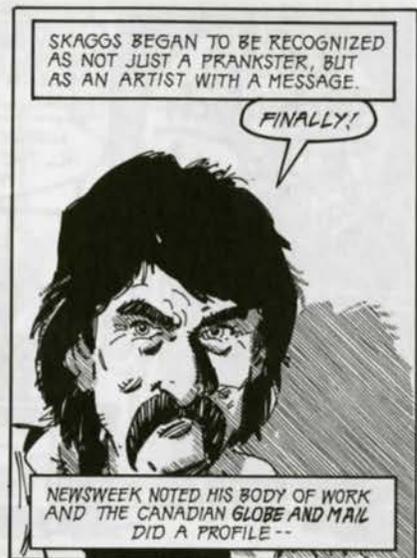
THE DECEPTION WORKED SO WELL THAT SKAGGS FOUND HIMSELF FORCED TO ACTUALLY BECOME AN AGENT.



"FISH CONDOS," HIS SATIRE ON YUPPIES, GOT HIM IN LIFE MAGAZINE AND ON "GOOD MORNING AMERICA"

THEY'RE AQUARIUMS FOR UPWARDLY MOBILE GUPPIES.

AMAZING!



What is the difference between a prankster and a scammer? How do you define what you do?

A scammer typically does something deceptive for ill-begotten gain, usually for money or power. A prankster uses trickery to humiliate or embarrass someone, usually just for kicks. But I have a different agenda. I prank the news media and through them, the general public, to expose hypocrisy, social injustice and the misuse of power and authority.

I have always thought of the prank as fine art and I apply the same criteria to my pranks as I would to a painting or a sculpture. To me, intent is the little word with the most meaning. Having clear intention and purposeful content can elevate a prank from being shallow, hostile or vindictive to something that creatively manipulates ideas and emotions and gets people thinking about things in a different way.

I use various disciplines and tactics to attract media coverage, from press releases, brochures, print ads, bogus websites and TV commercials to elaborate unsanctioned performances with colorful characters, costumes and props.

What prompted you to begin questioning the authenticity of the media?

As a young artist growing up in the 60s in New York City, I realized there is a difference between the business of art and the creative process of being an artist. There were many social and political inequities that profoundly disturbed me — the lack of civil rights, the hypocrisy of democracy, the war in Vietnam, to name a few. Rather than be dependent upon the art “scene” to express myself, which required acceptance by galleries, museums and art critics, I chose to take to the streets. My works were raw, provocative, controversial and got me in trouble with the authorities. As my stories reached the news, I watched how the mass media twisted and changed my intent to suit their own audiences and agendas.

In 1968, I attempted to construct a life size Vietnamese village on Christmas day in Central Park. It was to be a Nativity scene which I planned to attack with my “army” and burn to the ground [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/viet.html>]. My purpose was to protest the war in Vietnam. I had announced my intentions on the Bob Fass show on WBAI Radio before the event. On Christmas morning, there was a large crowd of spectators, journalists and police waiting for us, so I went to a different location in the park. As we began the performance, the police closed in and arrested numerous participants. The New York Times ran a story the next day with the headline, “Yippie ‘Nativity Scene’ Leads to Tickets for Littering.” Their slant on my anti-war protest was very typical of the time. The American public and mass media were not yet opposed to the war. Anyone who objected was considered anti-American. I saw first-hand the weakness and inherent danger in the media’s reporting of the facts.

Why do you find media hoaxes to be the most effective way for you to make social commentary?

As my work evolved, I realized the importance of the media in conveying my message. For the most part, I was simply a spectacle - an isolated news story. They didn’t care about my intent. My type of anti-government, anti-religion, anti-establishment public performance was very radical at that time. Rocking the status quo was threatening. What I was doing was not an acceptable art form. I didn’t care. I was not concerned about just making art. I was interested in making commentary and hopefully effecting social change.

I was also interested in the immediacy of the media. Had I wanted to write a book, I’d have to get an agent and a publisher. If I wanted to do a movie, I’d have to find the funding to do the film. So rather than dedicating a protracted amount of time doing those types of projects, I was able to quickly access the media, get my story out there, reach millions of people, and move on to something else.

Before 1976, my works were ironic reversals, juxtapositions of reality or in-your-face confrontations. Starting with the Cathouse for Dogs in 1976 [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/cat.html>], I added hoaxing to my repertoire and began to use the media as my medium the way a painter uses a canvas. I wanted to expose the media's prejudices, irresponsibility, gullibility and vulnerability.

Realizing that humor works better than confrontation, I set out to burst the pompous, pretentious media bubble by pranking them with satire. I began creating realities that were plausible, but totally fabricated. They were designed to make you laugh and also make you think. They had hooks too enticing to ignore, like Metamorphosis, the Cockroach Vitamin Pill hoax [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/meta.html>], where I said I was a world leading entomologist using vitamin pills made from the extract of cockroach hormones to cure all the common ailments known to man. And there was the Fat Squad [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/fat.html>], an organization through which you could take out a contract on yourself to have commandos around-the-clock keep you on your diet. And the Bad Guys Talent Management Agency [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/bad.html>], an agency for bad guys, bad girls, bad kids and bad dogs. The media, in falling for these hoaxes, not only became the conduit, reporting my work as if it was real, but became part of the work itself.

One is never in control of what happens in the media and I found that to be exciting. It's one thing when you do a painting. It's just you and the surface. It's another thing when you do a media prank. You never know how it's going to turn out. Will you succeed in accessing the media? Who will fall for it? When you do expose the truth? How will they take it? Will your message be conveyed?

My point is not to condemn all journalism and all news media. It is to expose some of the inherent flaws — such as bigoted, biased, and shallow reporting. There are fantastic journalists doing significant and dangerous work trying to bring the truth to the public. They are not my target. But by accessing the media, I'm not only able to critique it, but I'm also able to get attention for issues I think are important.

Tell us the essential elements needed for pulling off an effective prank.

I don't do Candid Camera-type jokes. I don't try to single out an individual. I don't do this for monetary gain. I work hard not to break the law, because jail is the last place I want to be. So here's what I think is important:

Motive. First, you need a reason. What is your subject and what are you saying? Is something profoundly disturbing you? Are you pointing out a social injustice? Do you have an agenda you want to bring attention to?

Story. Next you need a good story with an element of plausibility or some sort of universal truism. Something that deals with human needs or emotions. Then you need to add something outrageous, sensational, sexy. Essentially, you're feeding the mark what they want to hear, presented in a way they can swallow.

It's all in the telling of the story. How do you want to tell it? Is it going to be a performance? Are you going to have a large group of people, several people or just you? Are you going to repeat it, or just do it once? Whatever you do, make sure it's well documented. Because it is essentially ephemeral. I make sure that I document everything and collect the news stories wherever they appear (print, radio, television, Internet).

Secrecy. I've been extremely fortunate to have good friends and co-conspirators who have helped keep everything a secret. I've sent impostors a number of times and have had to keep quiet for weeks to make sure the show didn't discover they'd been had before the piece aired.

When I sent my friend Norman Savage to play me on To Tell the Truth [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/truth.html>], one of the most famous game shows in American television history, where celebrity panelists try to determine which of three people claiming to be someone, is actually that person, I had to create phony IDs so he could pick up the plane ticket to California under my name. Today that would be a federal offense. Who knows what kind of shit storm it would create. And the authorities would be happy to treat you like a terrorist because the status quo does not like to

be messed with. People tend to lump culture jammers and media activists in with vandals, liars and scammers so they can be dismissive.

Budget. This is a production and it has to be affordable. You need to figure out how much it's going to cost and be inventive to keep it cheap.

Patience. Things may not take off immediately.

Portability. Whatever you physically create needs to be either removable or discardable in case you have to run away. But, you might want to keep some sort of trophy to exhibit later.

Cunning, wit, and guile. You need the ability to improvise.

Support. It really pays to have a support team in case things go wrong. This could be people who can either bail you out, document what you're doing, or who are willing to jump in and rescue you.

Expect the unexpected and be prepared for failure. Some things might not work out as you hoped. For example, when I launched a protest in front of the UN for my Stop BioPEEP hoax [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/stop.html>], the news broke that President Clinton got a blow job from Monica Lewinsky. All other news was preempted for days. So, you have to be persistent and look for other ways to get your message out.

Telling the truth. This is where the fun really begins. It is essential to send out a press release revealing the hoax and explaining why you did it. The media's initial coverage will probably have been very different from your stated purpose. They rarely get the facts right, much less any subtlety or irony that you may have implanted in the project. And, they are humorless when it comes to being fooled. If the outlets you fooled won't run a retraction, find someone else who will.

I wrote a recipe called "The Well-Cooked Journalist" that lists the ingredients for a great hoax. You can find it at: [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/comm/comm15.html>].

Some pranks, like the "Cathouse for Dogs" fell into a gray area because there were no laws in place regarding what you were supposedly doing, running a bordello for dogs. You were subpoenaed by the Attorney General's office for running a house of prostitution. Are you often walking a fine line with the law and do you usually seek legal advice before you conduct a hoax?

I do walk a fine line. And I've probably crossed it a number of times, even though it's my objective not to break the law. In 1976, there was no law on the books against running a house of prostitution for canines [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/cat.html>]. But that didn't stop the authorities from trying to arrest me after I staged a night in a bordello for dogs with 25 actors and 15 dogs, which was televised by Midnight Blue in New York.

The media quickly expressed outrage, which I encouraged by writing letters to the Soho Weekly News under bogus names, both complimenting and complaining about the service. I was inundated with telephone calls from people who not only wanted to get their dogs laid for fifty bucks, but also from people who either wanted to have sex with dogs or watch people having sex with dogs.

To fan the flames, I created an additional controversy within the controversy to keep suspicious minds from questioning the original premise: I sent out a second press release denying there was sexual activity between animals and humans. Animal protection agencies like the Bureau of Animal Affairs, the ASPCA as well as various religious and humane organizations and the NYPD Vice Squad were morally offended and pursued me. I was subpoenaed by the State Attorney General and deposed, at which point I revealed the hoax (with a Channel 5 TV news crew there to document it). Since there was no evidence that I had done anything illegal, the charges were dropped.

WABC TV news, which had done an investigative documentary about cruelty to animals, featuring my Cathouse for Dogs as it's centerpiece and winning an Emmy Award for it, refused to admit they had been hoaxed. The producer said I only said it was a hoax to avoid prosecution.

When you do the kinds of performances I've done, you can certainly expect outrage. You want to rock their boat. That's how you get coverage and make your point.

Do I consult attorneys in advance? Sometimes, just so I know the parameters of what I'm dealing with. But you'd be hard pressed to find an attorney who would encourage you to do anything along these lines because the outcome is unpredictable and the most unexpected things can happen, some of which could land you in a whole lot of trouble.

An attorney's job is not just to protect you from other people, but also to protect you from yourself. Had I listened to attorneys I never would have done anything. On the other hand, I have had attorneys who have volunteered to be there for me if I needed them.

What has been your most successful hoax in terms of the change it brought about?

I don't know. I've tackled issues like racism, sexism, prejudice, cultural intolerance, greed and vanity in sometimes funny, sometimes provocative, sometimes ironic, and sometimes indirect ways. Examples: Dog Meat Soup [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/dog.html>], Sexonix [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/sex.html>], Save the Geoduck [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/geo.html>], and The Solomon Project [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/solo.html>].

I put it out there and it gets disseminated to a large audience. But, other than direct feedback, how does one tell if you've inspired anyone to rethink their position? It could be you're just preaching to the choir. Over the course of my career I've received numerous responses from people who have said that my work has affected them, and that's always rewarding to hear. But has it made a difference to the evolution of human consciousness? Perhaps just my own.

Why is the reveal the most important part of your pranks?

Each hoax is like doing a film or theater piece. It's produced, directed, staged, essentially with three acts: the "hook" — the execution of the concept; the "line" — tracking and recording who's fallen for it and what they are saying about it; and the "sinker" — the exposé. This is when I reveal to the media and the public that what they have believed is not true. Of course there is great pleasure in the "gottcha" aspect of any hoax, but I believe the "aha" moment, the revelation that you've been fooled is the most important. "Ahhhhh, I've been had. What else have I believed that I shouldn't have?"

Essentially what I'm trying to accomplish in my work is to get people to question their own belief systems and prejudices. What do you believe? How'd you come to those beliefs? Have you ever questioned the source of those beliefs? If not, why not?

Over the years how has the media as well as the general public responded once they realize they have been duped?

If you mean have people been upset, wanted to arrest me, physically harm or kill me? Of course! If I didn't provoke a powerful response, my work wouldn't be successful.

Generally speaking, whichever media source you fool is usually not inclined to give you the same amount of attention they gave you when you hoaxed them. So if you've had the great fortune of leading the news, most likely, the retraction, if any, will be buried somewhere else. That's because they don't want the audience to question their credibility as an investigative news source. If they give you any credit at all, they are more likely to attack you, dismiss you, trivialize you, or miss your point all together.

I don't rest though until I've found a way to get the truth out. If the mainstream media refuses to acknowledge they've been had, some alternative media will usually do the story. And then there's the Internet...

Was there a point or a particular prank where you thought you took things too far, or the situation got bigger than you were ready for?

It goes with the turf. I have an idea where things are going, but I never know what to expect. I try to take it as far as it will go. It's like a snowflake that turns into a snowball that turns into an avalanche. I ultimately have no control, but that's what makes it exciting. Each piece takes on a life of its own with the media becoming part of the process. Their coverage, whether biased, prejudiced or factual, only adds to the tone and duration of the controversy. The media is quite capable of contriving aspects of the story all by themselves. Dog Meat Soup is a good example of a piece that became explosive.

I wanted to address racism and cultural intolerance in society and how we position ourselves as the self-appointed cultural police of the world, with the media as the enforcers of what's acceptable and what's not. The news media, whether overtly or covertly, help to mold the way people think. Without expressly admitting it, they stream a steady flow of propaganda.

The idea for Dog Meat Soup was simple. I planned to send out a letter that was so suggestive and sensational that all I would have to do is sit back and record what happened. The letter was written in comical pidgin English from a Korean company called Kea So Joo, Inc. (which means Dog Meat Soup). It offered to buy unwanted dogs for \$.10 per pound from animal shelters. The dogs would be cooked, canned and sold at Asian markets to be consumed by humans. I had Korean friends help execute the letter and the outgoing phone message on my answering machine, which said in both English and Korean, "Thank you for calling Kea So Joo. Please leave a message." There were small dogs yapping in the background sounding as if they were about to be thrown into a pot of boiling water.

All this hoax required was the letter, an auxiliary phone line with an answering machine, a P.O. box address at my local copy shop, and the willingness of the owner and his assistant (friends of mine who had always wanted to be in a hoax) to cover my identity if any authorities showed up.

Predictably, upon receipt of the letter, the animals rights activists and animal shelter people went berserk. They thought it was real and needless to say their responses were extremely hostile. Almost immediately, my phone rang off the hook. I received a staggering amount of voice messages and faxes and, within days, cards and letters, that were absolutely unbelievable. People were desperate to stop this business and threatened to do the most vile and despicable things to the proprietor and other non-specific Asians (because they couldn't tell the difference between Chinese, Japanese and Korean people). One said, "Why don't you go back to your home country and make a business out of selling your little dirty Asian babies to Americans as ground meat. I'm sure the world would be a better place if we killed those children instead of allowing them to grow up to think like you." Another said, "How dare you live in America." And, "Why don't you kill yourself... and send your organs to the various charities in order that worthy humans may continue life on this planet." And, "How about Asian Stew? Asian hands a specialty."

It was amazing to see people unhinged like that, so threatened over the idea of dogs being consumed. The tragedy is that millions of dogs are mistreated, tortured, abandoned, starved to death or euthanized and discarded in America every year. But that's accepted as normal. What's considered abnormal by our society is that people might eat them.

The story led the news on TV and in print in New York and around the country. Numerous networks ran stories like: "Exclusive! Dogs for food. They're man's best friend but are they a meal?" I was able to follow what was going on because I could talk on my home phone with my friend at the Luce Press Clipping service. He would read me the stories he was collecting for me as they came in. On TV, journalists ambushed Asians on the street to ask if they knew anything about this. In print, journalists blamed Asians for the dogs disappearing in local neighborhoods. Some said they had spoken with the Koreans on the phone and had made arrangements to purchase dogs. Since I never answered a single phone call, this was completely impossible. Even if I wanted to, I couldn't have pulled it off because I couldn't imitate a Korean accent. As I had anticipated, I had enraged the animal rights people who got the media to get the government to come after me. But in order to do it, both activists and journalists lied. This was outrageous, but didn't surprise me. This kind of activity happens all the time, but to watch it unfold and record the entire process just underscored my distrust of the media's ability to present the truth. To totally fabricate the story to suit their own agenda betrayed all the ethical standards of journalism. This is one of the reasons I do this – to present the reality to the public that

what they are told to believe in isn't necessarily the truth. The media is a conduit for corporations, government interests, and groups with an agenda. They constantly feed us disinformation, propaganda and spin.

Back to the story: The copy shop was inundated with all kinds of pissed off authorities and journalists looking for the Korean business man. They staked the place out, terrifying my friends, who stayed true to the mission even though, in their own words, they were "shaking in their shoes." The authorities wanted to know when this guy would come in to pick up his mail and was there a street address and phone number. My friends said, "We don't know. He comes in, gets his mail and pays his bill. We don't know anything about him."

Eventually, the Dog Meat Soup phone number was traced back to my home address. Authorities then staked out my apartment building at 107 Waverly Place. This information was relayed to me by my neighbors. They said there were people on the roof tops with binoculars looking for caged dogs in my back yard. I was actually the one in a cage. The only way out of my apartment was through the back yard, over the fence and out through a neighbors front door. They all covered for me.

After the story received adequate coverage, I decided to reveal the truth. My admission was met with equal hostility and disdain by many. Some journalists refused to accept it. Others wanted to have me incarcerated. Luckily, I had agreed, in spite of huge reservations, to allow John Tierney, a journalist from The New York Times, to follow the entire hoax from beginning to end. His article in the Sunday Times Magazine was the only honest coverage of what actually happened [http://joeyskaggs.com/html/dogsinker/dogtierney.jpg].

In the last 15 years "culture jamming" has in a way become mainstream and taken on many new forms, "street art" being one of the most popular namely the reinterpreting of billboards by artists. It has gotten so big that corporate advertising has adopted the same guerrilla tactics that were once used against them. It has blurred the lines between advertising and satirical art. Do you think culture jamming will become less effective as it grows in popularity?

Not necessarily less effective, but there's definitely a lot more company in the streets. It's not just marketers who have jumped on the bandwagon coopting these counter culture techniques. Political operatives, out to cause calamitous damage to individuals and organizations, study these tactics as well, as is evident by James O'Keefe's "performance art" ambush of outgoing NPR executive Ron Schiller and previous to that, of ACORN, both engineered to politically embarrass and take these organizations down.

And then there are the establishment network offerings like Jon Stewart, Steven Colbert, Sacha Baron Cohen and the late night TV hosts who also frequent, or pretend to frequent, the streets with their high budget, professionally crafted humor/satire. It's definitely challenging for independent artists to have their voices heard. But at the same time, the Internet and social networking offers all kinds of opportunities for ideas to break out. I think that ultimately creativity trumps all and there will always be room for unsanctioned satire... unless they make it illegal. It just might not be labeled as culture jamming or media activism or billboard liberation.

Dissent and rejection of the status quo have been called many things over the course of history. Culture jamming is just another buzz word for satirical cultural critique, which has always been around. It is successful because it manifests in surprising places with unexpected techniques. It causes shock and therefore draws attention. Artists will always use any canvas or technology that is available, be it the street, a wall, a billboard or the Internet, to creatively express their ideas. Once new ground is broken, trends grow and eventually subside. Advertisers will always use whatever techniques they think will reach their target audience, which is how dissent gets watered down and becomes commercialized. But it works both ways. Some of the artists who deface billboards, changing the messages in clever ways, or who create theatrical street actions, showing the social power of the flash mob, ultimately become part of the establishment themselves. Perhaps their original intent was really to grab attention and become commercially successful.

It's naïve to think that it's not all about marketing. It IS all about marketing. You're either marketing a product, a service, an idea or a philosophy. It's a shock and a disappointment when a cultural icon,

someone who you think represents your values and is fearless in challenging authority, appears to “sell out” to the establishment by joining the world of commerce. But actually, the disappointment says more about you and your fantasies than them. It’s up to you to figure out what’s really going on.

Around the time the Internet really started picking up is when I noticed that major corporations like Nike, Red Bull and ESPN really started to penetrate certain street cultures. I’ve heard stories where ESPN purchases video content of action sports but it has to meet a certain criteria, (no cursing, no sports logos on clothes, no extremely dangerous “stunts”). So now you have major corporations controlling the media for counter cultures who’s media outlets previously existed without any kind of filter. The content people are seeing is not really a true representation of what is going on in the streets. It’s amazing for me to watch this unfold. With the advent of the internet I would assume it would be easier for counter cultures to hold the reigns and control their media outlets but that’s not the case.

Money, money, money. In most instances, it rules. That’s just reality. Another side to that reality is that media literacy is more and more important. Not being able to tell the difference between paid advertising and a culture jam is a real problem, especially for impressionable kids.

I believe that a lot of people voluntarily allow themselves to buy into bad information. In this day and age I feel like people as a whole at least acknowledge the fact that the media cannot be trusted 100%. Why do you suppose that people still choose to believe what they hear even though they don’t fully trust the source?

We are bombarded constantly with information meant to mold our opinion, whether about a product or a political or religious agenda. It’s almost impossible to not be influenced by the disinformation fed by the media to the public. We all tend to be in denial about one thing or another, and we all seem very willing to suspend critical analysis for wishful thinking.

In 1993, when the Internet was becoming a mass medium, I did what is considered to be the first Internet hoax. It was called Sexonix [<http://joeyskaggs.com/html/sex.html>]. I sent out emails to electronic bulletin boards (precursors of forums and chat rooms) saying that three of my sexual virtual reality experience pods, en route to the Metro Toronto Christmas Gift and Invention Show, had been confiscated by Canadian border guards and that I couldn’t get them back. I blasted the Canadian government’s Puritanical repressive policies. I made a plea to the general public to call upon the officials to release my equipment so that Canadian citizens could experience sexual virtual reality. The BBS users were outraged and responded in my defense. When it was revealed that it was a hoax, they became righteously indignant and flamed me. Many of them considered themselves to be super intellectuals. They thought they were in a safe zone, where people were who they said they were and that everything on the Internet was true. I thought they were tremendously naive thinking the Internet was their domain, void of any sort of intervention from corporate influence or from government control or, for that matter, from me.

I’ve had conversations lately about political incompetency, about the power of special interest groups and corporations and most people I talk to, conservative or liberal, exhibit a high degree of acceptance. A lot of people say, “Yeah it’s fucked up, but what are you going to do?” Do you think this generation is less revolutionary than past generations? Do you think we have become too complacent as a society?

Of course I do. I came of age in the sixties. There were all kinds of social inequities that were not acceptable to people my age. Call it naivety, call it self-importance, call it romanticized idealism... we believed we could make a difference. We acted accordingly and our numbers grew. Much like we’ve seen recently in the streets of Egypt, even though it now seems they’ve ousted one dictator for another set of assholes.

In America today, most people are unwilling to get hit on the head, maced in the face or arrested. People are lulled by the concept of democracy, believing that change will come from politicians. We’re not living in an oppressive dictatorship, so social outrage is more muted.

Certainly there are activists working in all facets of society to make the world a better place, and Occupy Wall Street shows promise, but, in general, people are softer and fatter, with a sense of entitlement. They seem to have only two keys on their keyboard, “m” and “e,” and they gravitate towards what’s easy.

Very little has changed over the years. We still kill one another, we’re still greedy, we still pollute and we still believe in fairy tales. It’s a sad reality that the consciousness of humanity hasn’t evolved further.

To be a voice of dissent takes a certain mind set. It may seem like a waste of time, but the alternative, settling for apathy, mediocrity and the loss of freedom, was never a choice for me.

You have talked before about how the media like any other business has a bottom line. Many of the other institutions that you make social commentary about, like religious institutions and the government, also operate with the bottom line at the forefront. If money trumps all, how, in a capitalist world, do we find truth?

It’s on every dollar bill. It says “In God we trust.” Most people are not looking for truth. They think it already exists, recorded in some religious doctrine, like the Bible or the Koran. To me, this type of blind faith has always been the height of arrogance and cowardice. Fortunately, there are still people who have an open mind and are willing to live with uncertainty, recognizing they have more questions than they have answers.

If there is one thought or idea that you wish to leave people with, what is it?

If at first you don’t succeed, keep on sucking until you do suck seed.



From the Media Weekly Independent Newspaper

In the Sixties he turned hoaxing from stunt into fine art, and that's why Joey Skaggs is Mark Borkowski's mentor

Anyone who has delusions of influencing the media ought to see the recently released movie *The Yes Men*, an object lesson in how to turn pranksterism into political action.

It is the work of Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, a pair of anti-corporate film-makers-cum-political activists who set up a website posing as the World Trade Organization. Despite it being an obvious spoof, they were soon invited by corporate types to speak at trade conferences all over the world. There they expounded what they felt were clearly satirical points of view (using slavery as an economic model, selling votes to influence elections, etc), only to find them welcomed as progressive ideas in the world of global commerce and trade.

It is a good film, making a good point. But there's nothing as effective in it as the stunt that the Yes Men pulled last December on the 20th anniversary of the Bhopal chemical disaster in India. Bichlbaum and Bonanno had earlier set up a bogus website for Dow Chemical, the US company that took over Union Carbide, the plant's owners at the time of the catastrophe that has killed 20,000 in the 20 years since it happened, and someone at the BBC logged on in the hope of an interview. In a magnificent piece of effrontery, Bichlbaum went on air posing as a Dow spokesman and announced that, after 20 years of evasion and denial, Dow had finally accepted full responsibility for the disaster and would pay £12bn in compensation. What was brilliant about this was not the stunt itself, which was criticised for giving false hope to the victims' families (albeit for only two hours, until Dow woke up to the hoax), but its effect forcing Dow to retract its apology and withdraw the bogus compensation offer.

In an age of cheap PR stunts, the Yes Men are following in the distinguished footsteps of one of my mentors. Joey Skaggs' distinguished career of anarchic stunts demonstrates the difference between a prankster and a publicist, while at the same time making the prank an art work. What Skaggs does is manipulate the media in order to highlight hypocrisy. As a result, much of the media, who are not known for enjoying jokes at their own expense, dislike him. Crucially, Skaggs does not work for anyone but himself. He has no unseen corporate clients lurking in the background, and he rarely profits from his stunts (although he has made a tidy living from his "fish condos": designer apartments for guppies that started as a joke and ended up being must-have gifts for yuppies the very people who were the butt of the joke).

Skaggs considers himself to be a performance artist, and cites as his influences the Surrealists and Absurdist of an earlier era. While others use publicity to sell us stuff, he's a refreshing throwback to the more innocent age of men such as P T Barnum and Jim Moran.

A proper prankster (such as Skaggs or the Yes Men) picks deserving victims and makes them look gullible or foolish, making us laugh while making his point. Skaggs is a master of this form of hoax because he always has a point to make and he's never trying to sell us anything because he's not looking for profit.

I first made contact with him when I was researching my book (*Improperganda The Art of the Publicity Stunt*), but he made his name long before that. Skaggs is a product of the Sixties counter-culture, and that is what separates him from his acolytes today. America in the Sixties was an era of anti-Establishment protest, and it's in that spirit that Skaggs staged and still stages his stunts.

The first was in 1966 when he carried a 10ft crucifix on an Easter parade in New York to rail against the hypocrisy of the Church and man's inhumanity to man. He later strung a 50ft bra across the steps of the US Treasury on St Valentine's Day to highlight the American male's obsession with female breasts. His premise was simple: he set out to ridicule the media façade, and the fallibility of the public's blind acceptance of the media, so he used the media as his medium.

One of his best stunts was a 1976 newspaper ad announcing the opening of a brothel for dogs ("A cat house for dogs featuring a savory selection of hot bitches"), followed by a photo-opportunity for the media. One TV company was nominated for an Emmy for its coverage of an event that was not only a figment of Skaggs' brilliant imagination, but proof of how easy it was to manipulate the media with two of their favourite subjects sex and animals. Only when Skaggs faced prosecution did he expose the idea as a "conceptual performance piece".

Other stunts by Skaggs to fool the press included the opening of a "Celebrity Sperm Bank", where Bob Dylan and The Beatles had allegedly left deposits again satirising the media's obsessions with sex and medical advances. And a bogus laboratory where Dr Josef Gregor (alias Skaggs) had bred a strain of cockroaches that produced hormones that would cure all known ailments and protect humans from radiation. The press, in its frenzy to report the new miracle drug, failed to note that the doctor's name was strangely similar to the character in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* who turned from a human into a giant insect.

My favourite was when Skaggs appeared on national TV as "Joe Bones" to launch his "Fat Squad" \$300-a-day commandos who would shadow dieters throughout their day to prevent them snacking in a send-up of America's obsession with obesity and diets. Almost as good was when he posed as the president of a Korean organisation called Kea So Joo, sending letters to dog shelters asking for any unwanted canines to be sent to him for food, causing predictable outrage in the media, much of it with racist overtones. Perhaps none of the writers were Korean, or they would have smelt a rat from the organisation's name it means "Dog Meat Soup with Alcohol" in Korean.

Perhaps Skaggs is my greatest contemporary muse. Without him there would have been no Yes Men, no Michael Moore, because Skaggs as little known as he is is the originator. Unlike Moore, he is not driven by ego, because he is an artist first and an activist second. Because he shies away from publicity for himself, he remains unknown to the world at large, but his name should be written in lights as an example to us all. Hang on... I think I know just the man to do it. Now, where did I put Joey's phone number?

14 March 2005 10:06



FLUX

SPRING
FRESH
TUNES



David Byrne

The Hoaxer

Antony Price

Bobby Conn

JT Leroy

Kenny Schachter

Kid 606
Kid 609

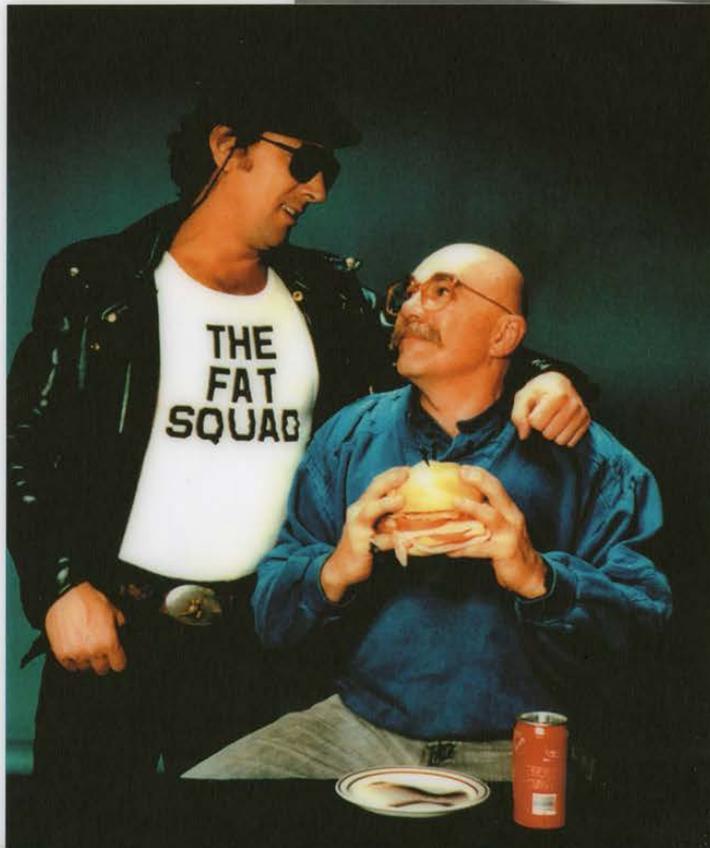
Wintersweat Special





“We either
fool
ourselves or
we’re being
fooled -
there’s only a
change of
consciousness
when we
realise we’re
being
fooled.”

48 FLUX *speaking in tongues*



Joey Skaggs is THE HOAXER

words DAVID PIPER

What better medium for your art than the media? Fancy creating reality for millions of people? Let's make up the news! It's being done, and awesomely: Joey Skaggs (aka Joe Bones, Prof. Joseph Scagliozi, Kim Yung Soo, and many more) has been wildly fooling the world's press and broadcast news for more than 30 years, leaving nothing but an incandescent trail of ridiculous inventions and red-faced reporters.

How do you measure the impact you make? By how many people have appreciated your paintings, danced to your music, come in their hundreds or thousands to your nightclub or your rally, or been the beneficiary of your charitable acts or Dadaist interventions? Yes, you go-getters! I find it easy, or convenient, to imagine most Flux readers make an interesting difference, or at least aspire towards it - but for the moment, it's all *me* changing reality. Oh, don't stop reading - I can feel the power already...

After a certain point, however, a limit is reached. Personal contact, or word of mouth, except in the most outstanding circumstances, will only go so far, and the only step up - a huge one - is the self-appointed arbiter and chronicler of the world - the news media. The news is not only the truth, but reality itself: if it's not on the news, then it didn't happen. The small things that happen every day are on a completely different scale. If an event is set in print or on screen, it may not touch us directly, and it'll be one step removed from us - *mediated* - but it will also have a weight, an undeniable authority, and a recorded permanence: it will affect the world of millions. The reported world is its own reality, and we believe it.

So, what better medium for your art than the media? Fancy creating reality for millions of people? Let's make up the news! It's being done, and awesomely: Joey Skaggs (aka Joe Bones, Prof. Joseph Scagliozi, Kim Yung Soo, and many more) has been wildly fooling the world's press and broadcast news for more than 30 years, leaving nothing but an incandescent trail of ridiculous inventions and red-faced reporters. The last hoax he did in England, as Baba Wa Simba ('The Lion King'), a well-travelled spiritual healer who promised to care for "the wounded animal inside all of us," had several journalists and television presenters crawling on all fours and roaring like pathetic lions for the cameras.

A tricycle-mounted confessional booth? A psychic lawyer? A canine brothel ('Cathouse for Dogs')? A cemetery that's also a theme park, with mausoleums as rides themed around death? Not only does he have a superb imagination, and clinical execution (not to mention, as they say in New York, a whole load of chutzpah), but also, without any contrivance, a lot of the trickster figure about him. He appears in almost all the stunts, but is rarely,

if ever, recognised. The Entertainment Tonight show, proud of never having been pulled a swift one, asked him to appear, so he sent a friend of his to impersonate him. At one point, the presenter asked 'Skaggs' why he was wearing dark glasses. "Oh well," he said, taking them off, "nobody's going to recognise me anyway." They still thought he was the real one. None of the pranks has ever failed; only when the befuddled news service refuses to acknowledge its failure (he soon reveals the true nature of every story) is there anything less than maximum impact. One magazine has considered making it compulsory to ask every news source if he is Joey Skaggs.

The media, he says, have been more than eager to swallow his stupid lies, because he makes them so tempting - and brilliantly obvious: "To catch flies you got to have honey or shit." He often says in interviews, with a glint in his eye, that he doesn't actually want them to change, both because it suits him so much, and, one would like to think, he'd be lost without the opportunity to exercise his irrepressible urge to satirise and create large-scale, harmless havoc: "If we live in a world without satire and irony I'd rather be dead." He's found the perfect formula of stories they want to cover - the point between silliness and incredulity, with a heap of outrage thrown in. He provides the industry with some of the most entertaining stories ever - fishtank replica condos for upwardly mobile guppies, anyone - and then bites them, hard.

He has fun, shows up some fairly dodgy practices, and gets to lie to millions. "The media is just the vehicle... I use my imagination to embarrass the bullies." And he very successfully challenges the media, so self-righteous as bringers of truth, as lazy, or worse, liars (and they often have to admit it). What is the worth of this reality - such a large part of our world - if just anybody can tinker with it? "We either fool ourselves or we're being fooled - there's only a change of consciousness when we realise we're being fooled." So, let's play - never has the potential of lying been so great. ENDS
www.joeyskaggs.com



METROPOLITAN

Melbourne like it is

Dial M for Murdoch

RED faces reigned at our south bank competitor last week when an updated internal phone directory was distributed to News Limited staff. A quick glance under the "M" entries revealed the business numbers in Australia and New York of media magnate (and the big boss) Rupert Murdoch. Worse still, a near-by entry showed the (silent) home phone number of Rupert's mum, Dame Elisabeth. Gophers were swiftly dispatched to retrieve the bungled listings, but not before some enterprising journalists had photocopied the errant entries. Only the foolhardy would dare use them.

Hair today, hoax tomorrow

THIS is an alert to all Melbourne media. Joey Skaggs, aka the Reverend Anthony Joseph, aka the Lion King Joe Baba Wa Simba (we could go on for days here ...) is in town. Mr Skaggs, who arrived at the weekend, is a self-styled "conceptual performance artist" - in laypeople's terms that means he performs elaborate hoaxes on the media. His past achievements include "Hair Today" where, as Dr Joseph Chenango, he convinced American media to report his wild claims of a new cure for baldness that involved transplanting the hairy scalps from cadavers on to the tonsorially challenged. Last year on a visit to Britain (it should come as no surprise to readers that the offbeat Mr Skaggs is an American) he convinced the media there that he was Joe Baba Wa Simba, leader of a cult called "healing the wounded animal inside" through group antics that involved Baba Wa Simba tossing roast meat to a roomful of disciples, who devoured it on all fours in a primitive leonine ritual. This ritual was duly recorded by television cameras and press photographers and breathlessly detailed in news bulletins. "This pride of lions are (sic) actually humans striving to beat the everyday pressures and stresses of life," wrote the East London Advertiser. His other cons include a Korean company (whose name, translated, meant Dog Meat Soup), which outraged America by appealing to animal shelters for unwanted dogs to turn into food and medicine for "the Asian market". And the Portofess, a confessional booth pedalled around to parishioners by bicycle. It was accompanied by the slogan "Confession on the go for people on the move," and was duly reported across America by the respected Reuter news service. Skaggs has been doing this sort of thing since the 1960s, in a personal crusade against a "reactionary, gullible and intolerant" media. So be careful of what you read in the next week or so. You never know when he might strike ...



Doing the dag for Australia

HOW on earth they managed to concentrate on winning gold we'll never know. In a bid to escape the pre-Olympic hysteria, *Metropolitan* went trawling through the archives and found another kind of pre-Olympic hysteria (above) in the form of the national team uniforms of bygone days. The gang of five pictured is sporting the designs of the 1964 Tokyo Games, which look suspiciously like they were nicked from the TAA change rooms. From left: Bev Heath, Lionel Yorke, Vivien Egge, Beverly Stewart and Bill Hunter. Mr Hunter is wearing what is described as a marching outfit. Readers may have seen him more recently in a shiny suit (*Mariel's Wedding*) or mechanic's overalls (*Pricilla*) for he is the same Bill Hunter, actor, who



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Edited by Kendall Hill

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Winemaker Richard Geoffroy with Jeroboam number one

Coming of age

A very bonjour to all those Gallic types who celebrated the anniversary of the storming of the Bastille yesterday. *Metropolitan* got a headstart celebrations last week when a full audience at the ANZ Bank's Red Room witnessed the Aust-in unveiling of Dom Perignon's 1993 vintage for the next millennium. 1993 vintage comes in a jero-boam (a double magnum) and is duly ageing in Epervay, France, in preparation for its delivery in December 1999. Fittingly, 1993 numbered have been produced, with 25 in Australia. Twenty-three will be sold to buyers (at \$1,000), one of whom will win a Jeroboam. The 25th bottle will be sold to buyers (at \$20,000) for the three expensive champagne). Dom Perignon. Richard Geoffroy edu-ces about the champagne, its individual expression. But, try as we try long and hard, we couldn't separate champagne from roasted croissants and the cinnamon palate.

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Issue 89/April 2003
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The best ways
to get your snaps
on the Web

12 MULTIMEDIA
MOBILES
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April fool!

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No CD? Ask your retailer

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INTERVIEW

By Karen Stuart



Skaggs as a Korean businessman selling unwanted dogs for 10 cents a pound. Photo credit: Joey Skaggs Archive

The king of the April fools, Joey Skaggs is a performance artist of a very unusual kind. Frequently harnessing the Internet as a tool of mass trickery, he has questioned authority, embarrassed high profile reporters and made the preposterous believable with a lifetime of imaginative hoaxes designed to keep us on our toes. You can learn about Joey's pranks on his Web site at www.joeyskaggs.com, but for a peek at the man behind the many masks, read on.

Joey Skaggs

PROFILE OF A PRANKSTER

IA: One of your stated goals is to encourage more thorough reporting in the media. But why choose misinformation as your means?

JS: Hoaxes to me, in the way I create and execute them, are an art form. They are not just about pointing out the foibles of irresponsible journalists. They have a bigger meaning and are not limited to "Gee, the media is stupid." My pranks are targeted to issues I think are interesting. The hoax allows me to bypass all of the traditional avenues to communicate. For example, my Celebrity Sperm Bank Auction hoax in 1976 (Skaggs created a media furor when he staged an auction of sperm from the likes of Mick Jagger and John Lennon), dealt with the issues of technology Vs morality. There is always going to be opposition. To me art is about opposition. It's about new awareness and changing the status quo. Had I chosen to write a book about sperm babies, or do a documentary film, I would have had to deal with the bureaucratic machinery of the controlling venues: publishers or studios. Rather than go that route, I chose to use the immediacy, the gullibility, the vulnerability and the instantaneous accessibility of the news media.

IA: What have been some of the greatest achievements of your work to date?

JS: First one has to define what is meant by a great achievement. For some it's getting rich. For others it's getting famous. Or both. Success for me is measured by personal satisfaction that comes from feeling that I'm being creative, that I'm being positive, that I'm communicating and challenging people to question their thinking. I try to do that with all of my hoaxes. I only work on projects that inspire me. If they inspire someone else, it's all the better.

IA: Which of your performance pieces was the most fun? Why?

JS: Dog Meat Soup, The Fat Squad, Portofess...I try to incorporate fun into everything I do. But my sense of humor can be very different from someone else's. And I know, as a satirist, that there is a dark side - satire bites. I'm challenging people to question their preconceived opinions. In the process of doing a hoax, one must be open and flexible as other people's reactions can create unusual twists. That to me is fun. Not knowing where it's going, what's going to happen. Will it succeed? Will I be arrested? It's scary, exciting, dangerous, provocative and the juice I need as an artist.

IA: What role does the Internet play in your work?

JS: I began long before the advent of the Internet, but it has certainly been an interesting addition to my arsenal of tools. I have used it to perpetrate or accentuate a number of hoaxes, from Sexonix to Stop BioPEEP to The Final Curtain. For example, I have used postings and chat rooms, created bogus Web sites, benefited from inexpensive international email correspondence, done research and used it as a voyeur to watch my own work unfold.

IA: Do you believe the internet has contributed to or reduced misinformation?

JS: There has always been misinformation. And there will always be. Whether it's the town crier, the newspaper or the Internet. You cannot blame the medium for its messages.

IA: What's your reaction to the other less sophisticated Net hoaxes and scams floating around on email (see our feature on page 42)? Do they play a valuable role?

JS: Value is up to the individual. I find them to be unimaginative, annoying, sometimes vicious, and usually stupid. For the most part, they're so lame that I'm not even amused. The world is full of shit. There's some gold. What is shit and what is gold is different to everyone. What I consider to be a waste of time and boring could be exciting and innovative to someone else. What's the alternative though? Regulation? Making Net hoaxes illegal? Only have religious propaganda? Personally I'm turned off by the "noise" but I have to remind myself to have an open mind. Fortunately, I have a delete key, which I exercise regularly. But I think the world is certainly a more interesting place because of all the variety we're exposed to.

IA: What do you think motivates the people who create these?

JS: I am speculating, but most people are frightened, discontented, angry, lonely, tired of being told what's right and wrong — pranks and hoaxes offer an opportunity to vent.

IA: What are you working on at the moment?

JS: If I told you, you wouldn't believe me. So it's best left unsaid. And just as a courtesy warning, watch out...

C2

THE ARTS

The Globe and Mail, Saturday, July 18, 1992

What's red and green and seen all over?

WE'RE not talking traffic lights here, or even Santa's elves. We're talking *The Red Green Show*, of course.

After 1½ seasons on the air, the low-budget comedy series, co-produced by S&S Productions and Hamilton's CHCH-TV, is reaching audiences in all sorts of far-flung corners. How far flung? Well, thanks to the show's first international sale last fall, this quirky satire of manly men roughing it in the Canadian North can now be seen on TV sets in the Tropical South — Trinidad and Tobago, to be precise.

Steve Smith (of *Smith & Smith's Comedy Mill* fame) is the director, producer and creator of *The Red Green Show*. He's also the star, playing the laconic and unwittingly hilarious Red Green, grand pooh-bah of The International Brotherhood of Possums, Chapter 11 (motto: When all else fails, play dead). **Pat McKenna** portrays Red's sidekick — the nerdy nephew Harold.

Rick Green — no relation to Red — is associate producer and co-writer, as well as a cast member (you may know him as Commander Rick, the "renegade broadcaster" who hosts TVO's *Prisoners of Gravity*, or as a former member of The Frantics comedy troupe). Green tells us that since the show announced a few months ago it was starting a Red Green fan club, it's been flooded by more than 2,500 membership requests from across the country. "The show is really about male obsession; when guys are alone, they get into trouble. It's really struck a nerve. People write us letters — we've got binders full of them."

The show is widely available across Canada, thanks to syndication with a number of stations, and deals last year with

the two educational networks, MITV in the Maritimes and SCN in Saskatchewan. Australia recently followed Trinidad's lead, and the BBC is apparently taking an interest after seeing episodes from the new season (which recently wrapped production). And, says Green, the show is "dangerously close" to having a sale in the U.S.

In the fall, we're told to expect smoother-looking episodes, a bigger cast and more sitcom elements. (Sitcom elements? Hmmm... we're not sure that's necessarily a good thing.)

With all this buzz, it's not surprising that CHCH has already renewed the show for another season — even though the current season doesn't start until Sept. 22.

They've already started writing again.

Speaking of writing, and Rick Green, the play *Suits*, which he co-wrote with fellow former Frantic **Peter Wildman**, is being workshopped in Los Angeles starting this weekend, in preparation for a new production. Green says the comedy — a satire of big business — has been shortened, restructured and rewritten since its inaugural Toronto run last fall with the Canadian Stage Company (reviews of that show were, as they say, mixed. In fact, *The Globe* called it "unfunny, vulgar and unstructured." Oh dear). Second City alumnae **Linda Kash** and **Debra McGrath** are among the L.A. cast members.

Toronto magazine journalist **Robert Hough**



picked up his *Globe* and *Mail* on Tuesday and burst out laughing. The front page carried an Associated Press wire service photo of a Dominican friar named

Father Joseph sitting on a bicycle that was attached to a portable confessional booth or "Portofess." According to the wire service, Father Joseph was waiting for penitents outside the Democratic National Convention headquarters.

Hough immediately recognized Father Joseph as **Joey Skaggs**, 47, the U.S. media prankster (or self-described "sociopolitical satirist") — and one of the people Hough profiled in the June edition of *Saturday Night* magazine, in an article titled "America's Most Gullible." Sure enough, the next day, newspapers across North America carried a correction admitting the priest was a prankster. "He told me six months ago that he was planning something really big," says Hough. "This was a good one: the Portofess was beautifully made of burnished oak, the lettering was gold — it was beautiful."

Reached yesterday at his home in New York City, Skaggs said, "I'm still laughing." He scored big with this one: his latest prank was carried as a straight story not only by AP, but also Reuters, CNN, CBS, Italian television, Fox Broadcasting and hundreds of other local radio, television and newspaper outlets. Better yet, people actually went inside the Portofess and told their sins. "Father Joseph" refuses to reveal if any were Democrats, or what they said: "Sanctity of the confessional," he intones smugly.

Skaggs, who supports his pranking habit by selling art and giving lectures on media

literacy, should be a well-known face — a face to beware of — in newsrooms by now. He always uses his real name, or part of it, and his pranks are always well publicized, both before and after he reveals himself. He's also made people believe in his scheme Hair Today, which purportedly cured baldness with scalp transplants from the dead, and the Fat Squad, a group of enforcers you could supposedly hire to stop yourself from raiding your own fridge.

One of his best-known stunts, which won international media coverage in 1976, was his opening of a "Cat house for dogs." Skaggs publicized his canine brothel with bumper stickers that said "Get your Dog a Piece of Tail" and then hired actors and dogs to appear at a press conference and offer such services such as Dobermans specializing in sadomasochism.

He convinced everyone. ABC did a documentary on the "cathouse" (it was nominated for an Emmy award) and Skaggs had to defend himself in court on a morals charge and explain that it was all a prank.

But Skaggs understands that journalists are amnesiac. Despite the fact that Hough's *Saturday Night* article appeared only two months ago, several Canadian papers gave the photo big play, including all three Toronto papers, Montreal's *La Presse*, The Edmonton Journal and The Edmonton Sun. Indeed, **Patrick Harden**, the paper's former publisher recently turned Washington bureau chief, ever the dutiful journalist, interviewed Skaggs at length.

"It's unbelievable that the media can fall for him again and again," marvels Hough. "But there's always some kind of underlying satirical message to his work — politics and sinners! It resonates, it's brilliant. He's the fine Swiss watch-maker of media pranksters."



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N° 2

Une hilarante
leçon de morale

Une grande enquête de Nicolas Lewandowski

IL RIDICULISE TOUS LES MEDIAS

**Joey Skaggs
est implacable !**

Joey Skaggs est devenu la terreur des journalistes américains. Depuis cinq ans, il leur fait avaler des reportages bidons sur n'importe quoi. Une fois que la télé et la presse ont bien tartiné sur ses bordels pour chiens ou ses commandos anti-gros, hop ! l'horrible imposteur brise le masque et les laisse pa-tauger dans la confusion. Il appelle ça du Media Art et il se dit artiste, mais son art est terrible. Ses coups font le tour du monde. On s'en est vu proposer un une fois en comité de rédaction d'*Actuel*. A l'époque, nous n'en savions rien, nous n'avions pas encore rencontré Joey Skaggs.

**Plus c'est con,
plus ça marche**



En direct au journal de télé d'ABC News, Joey Skaggs explique comment sa pilule à base de cafards protège de de la radioactivité. Le présentateur gobe tout.

Les gags de Joey Skaggs mettent à nu le fonctionnement souvent débile des médias affamés de scoops et de gags, et qui ne vérifient pas l'information. Pour un journaliste, c'est terrible à imaginer. Nous trouvons cela sain. Que fait Joey ? Une fois qu'il a une idée bien tordue, alléchante, il s'organise, il se trouve une raison sociale, se fabrique un personnage, met en scène son imposture, loue des locaux, recrute des copains acteurs complices par dizaines et se fait un look. Puis il prépare ses communiqués de presse et les envoie dans les agences de presse et les rédactions. Imaginons les journalistes en mal de coups ou de sujets marrants qui ouvrent le courrier avant la réunion de rédaction : « T'as vu, incroyable ce truc ? »

C'est parti. Joey accueille le premier qui mord à l'hameçon. La mise en scène est parfaite. Joey a toujours son article. Après, c'est l'effet boule de neige. Les journaux se reprennent les uns les autres sans vérifier, la télé s'en mêle, Joey fait monter la sauce jusqu'au moment où il révèle tout.

Voilà le récit de ses coups les plus édifiants.



Joey Skaggs entouré des trente amis qui lui servent de complices et d'acteurs pour ses impostures.

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LA BRIGADE ANTI-COGNE AU 1^{ER} CHO



Cette malheureuse grassouillette voulait se faire une petite sucrerie. Son garde du corps l'en empêche.

« Obèses de tous les pays, punissez-vous ! Pour 300 dollars par jour, les brigades anti-gros vous surveillent vingt-quatre heures sur vingt-quatre et vous obligent à suivre votre régime. Pour tout renseignement, contacter : Joe Bones, New York City. »

Les coups de Joey Skaggs sont formidablement orchestrés. Sa méthode s'améliore d'ailleurs à chaque fois. Lorsqu'il a une idée qui germe dans son esprit, il la couche sur le papier et réunit ses copains. Ils fabriquent en

semble un mailing au style direct et clair. Un modèle de professionnalisme avec souvent de faibles moyens : du papier, des lettrages et une photocopieuse. Ils envoient ensuite le tout aux agences de presse, télévision, quotidiens new-yorkais et nationaux. Il ne reste plus qu'à surveiller le téléphone qui ne tarde d'ailleurs jamais à sonner. « Si je réussis à attraper un seul poisson, je sais que les autres suivront de toute façon », explique-t-il. Lorsque ce mailing sur les gros est arrivé sur les bureaux des rédacteurs-chefs, l'ambiance était celle des grands jours. L'effervescence a même fait tout de suite pêter les thermomètres

de la rédaction : « Coco, tu te renseignes sur ce type et tu fonces... » Le premier à foncer : le *Washington Post*. Six feuillets faciles qu'ils ont consacré à Joe Bones et ses commandos anti-gros. Un simple coup de fil a servi de reportage à Robert Pfeiffer, responsable de la rubrique « Style ».

Ces sales gros cachent leurs bons partout

« Nos clients souffrent tous de boulimie, lui raconte Joe Bones avec le ton posé de l'homme qui

maîtrise son affaire. Ils font appel à nous pour qu'on les aide à suivre leur régime diététique. Une sorte de garde du corps va les suivre partout, à toute heure du jour et de la nuit. L'agent des « Fat Squad » choisi pour cette mission doit être vigilant. Les gros sont rusés ! Certains essaient même de cacher des tablettes de chocolat dans la salle de bains. Si le client se fait surprendre à manger quelque chose que son régime lui interdit, les commandos doivent le lui arracher des mains, même de force. La plupart du temps, ça se passe plutôt bien. Nos commandos ont reçu une formation spéciale : ils sont cordiaux

-GROS COLAT

mais stricts. »

Emballé le reporter du *Washington Post* ! Joe Bones a même eu droit à son portrait pour illustrer le papier.

Trois jours après, le 5 mai 1986, le *Philadelphia Inquirer* emboîte le pas. Pour John Corr, le journaliste dépêché sur place, Joe Bones pousse même la confiance jusqu'à avouer d'où lui est venue l'idée : « Un de mes amis, un ancien Marine, pesait si lourd que ses guibolles ne pouvaient plus traîner une telle masse. Une succession de régimes à base de jus de carottes, de pissenlit au basilic, d'aiguilles dans les oreilles et de séances psycho-diététiques n'y ont rien fait. Un beau jour, sa femme lui a dit : « Mon vieux, ce qu'il te faut, c'est un sergent au cul vingt-quatre heures sur vingt-quatre ! Les Fat Squad étaient nés... ».

Tous les journaux ont repris texto son article

Le *Philadelphia Inquirer* n'hésite pas : une demi-page avec photo de la brigade au grand complet. L'auteur est aussi correspondant de l'agence Knight-Ridder qui revend des papiers à travers toute la presse américaine. Les Fat Squad vont ainsi se retrouver dans une bonne dizaine de quotidiens locaux. Du *Miami Herald* au *Daily News* en passant par *The Atlanta Constitution* chacun reprend texto l'article. En quinze jours, Joe Bones et ses Fat Squad sont cités dans toute la presse américaine. L'Europe et l'Australie sont touchés grâce aux agences de presse internationales. L'information galopante trouve avec les brigades anti-gros sa plus belle expression.



Joseph Bones, alias Joey Skaggs, répond aux questions de TF1.

COMME LES AUTRES, TF1 SE FAIT AVOIR

Une semaine après avoir déboulé dans les journaux, l'affaire de la brigade anti-gros envahit les télévisions. L'obésité, aux Etats-Unis, c'est une affaire nationale. En plus, des commandos anti-gros, et leurs clients, c'est visuel, non ? Le 13 mai, Joe Bones est l'invité vedette de l'émission *Good Morning America* sur ABC.

David Hartman, le Mousquetaire and stripes, le décroche pendant plus de dix minutes. Les caméras zooment sur les gueules patibulaires des commandos. De véritables Rambo de la diététique. Coiffé d'une casquette bleue aux couleurs des Fat Squad, Joe Bones se cache derrière des lunettes noires. Avec lui sur le plateau, une de ses clientes, Stephanie Mar-

tin. Pas franchement obèse, mais ses mensurations sont loin de rappeler celles de Mae West.

« Un peu que ça marche, explique-t-elle à David Hartman. J'ai perdu plus de trente kilos... C'est mon mari qui m'a offert les Fat Squad pour mon anniversaire. »

ILS MANGENT EN CACHETTE DANS LES WC

Le journaliste de ABC ne bronche pas. Il interroge Bones sur ses commandos.

« Vous savez, répond Bones avec conviction, les gens feraient n'importe quoi pour perdre du poids. Nous les aidons uniquement sur le plan émotionnel... et même physiquement si c'est nécessaire. »

Physiquement ? Hartman n'en revient pas.



Les commandos sont en direct sur le plateau. Hartman n'est pas rassuré !

Ce présentateur est tombé dans le piège. Il annonce le sujet sur les Fat Squad.

« Vous êtes sérieux ? Vous les retenez par la force s'ils ouvrent leur frigidaire ?

— Absolument ! Même en payant 300 dollars par jour, nos clients essayent quand même de tricher. J'en ai connu qui mangeaient en cachette dans les WC... Il faut enfoncer la porte ! Quelquefois, c'est pas évident... »

David Hartman écarquille les yeux, regarde la cliente qui sourit, passe en revue les muscles des commandos et risque une dernière question :

« Et si le client change d'avis et décide d'arrêter son régime ?

— Impossible. Nous signons un contrat avec lui. D'un côté comme de l'autre, on ne peut pas le résilier. »

Le journaliste de ABC se demande s'il ne rêve pas. C'est l'une de ses meilleures émissions ! Personne n'a tilté...

Pas plus Richard Roth de CNN qui tourne également le

sujet. Gros plan sur la petite enseigne installée à Waverly Place, près de Washington, le quartier Latin new-yorkais. Dans l'appartement, la plupart des commandos sont là, des acteurs au chômage que les planches ne nourrissent plus. Joe Bones explique au journaliste qu'il a déjà une centaine de clients. Un carnet de commandes plein pendant au moins un mois... Le reportage passe dans le journal télé du soir.

Alain Chaillou du bureau de TF1 à New York, a marché lui aussi. Il a filmé les Fat Squad et envoyé le sujet à Paris. Le matin de sa programmation dans l'émission de Jean-Claude Bourret *Bonjour la France*, coup de téléphone : « C'est Chaillou, les Fat Squad, c'est du bidon ! »

Trop tard ! Le reportage est diffusé en France. Et il n'y aura jamais de démenti.

Joey Bones, alias Joey Skaggs, a encore frappé.



Pourquoi Hartman fait-il cette gueule ? Parce qu'il est en train d'avouer à ses millions de fidèles téléspectateurs que les brigades anti-gros invitées la veille n'ont jamais existé : « On s'est fait avoir comme tous les autres. Désolé ! »

LES JOURNAUX PIEGÉS TIRENT LA TRONCHE



Des amies de J. Skaggs ou des chiennes, qui sont les plus aguicheuses ?



PREMIER BORDEL POUR CHIENS: 50\$ LE COUP

« Pour cinquante dollars, faites plaisir à votre meilleur ami, « the Cathouse for Dogs » vous propose une savoureuse sélection de chiennes en chaleur : depuis Fifi, la caniche de Paris, jusqu'à Lady the Tramp, la belle clocharde. Vétérinaire appointé. Photos autorisées. Détraqués s'abstenir. Chiens uniquement. » Cette annonce paraît en janvier 1976 dans le *Village Voice*.

Tout de suite, les coups de téléphone pleuvent : « Allo ! Dites-moi,

mon Médor me tire la tronche depuis trois mois. Il n'arrête pas de tourner en rond et de se faire des petites gâteries tout seul dans son panier... Vous croyez que je dois vous l'emmener ?... »
« Bien sûr ! Ce qu'il lui faut, c'est une bonne chienne lubrique. Nous avons une petite pékinoise qui ferait certainement l'affaire. Mais son agenda est complet pendant au moins trois semaines. Je vous inscris sur la liste d'attente ? »
« Allo, Cathouse for Dogs ? Voilà, j'ai une superbe femelle saint-bernard. Le problème, c'est que ça bouffe, ces bestioles. Et les fins de

mois sont difficiles... Enfin, vous comprenez... Heu... elle pourrait peut-être travailler pour vous... »
« Pas de problème. Sur les cinquante dollars la passe, vous touchez dix dollars et votre chienne l'équivalent en Canigou. »

Les chiennes prennent la pilule

Des appels comme ceux-ci, Joey Skaggs en a reçu près de quatre cents. Il y avait ceux qui voulaient faire plaisir à leur chien pour son anniversaire, ceux qui insistaient pour accéder

Les Fat Squad n'est pas un jeu. Malaise dans les rédactions. Démenti ou pas, c'est on tous cas le moment où la presse réagit le plus bizarrement. Quand elle veut bien réagir !...

Exemple : 2 mai 1986, Robert Pfeiffer, du *Washington Post*, écrit son article sur les Fat Squad. Deux semaines plus tard, le journal apprend que c'est du bidon. Cette fois, c'est Victoria Dawson qui prend la plume. Elle commence son article ainsi : « Plusieurs grands journaux, et parmi eux le *Washington Post*, ont découvert hier qu'ils s'étaient fait berné. Tous avaient repris l'histoires sur les Fat Squad. »

Victoria Dawson ne manque d'ailleurs pas de donner les noms des autres victimes. C'est toujours rassurant de savoir qu'on est pas les seuls. Ceux qui n'ont pas été piégés, au contraire, se frottent les mains. Ils profitent souvent de l'aubaine pour taper sur le concurrent.

C'est le cas du *Chicago Sun Times* qui règle ses comptes avec le *Chicago Tribune* : « Si vous avez pensé trouver la réponse à votre problème de poids dans le *Chicago Tribune* d'hier, vous avez tout faux ! La bonne ville de Chicago serait-elle en train de renaitre de ses cendres ?... »

Le plus inattendu des cas de figure reste pourtant la réaction du *National Enquirer* : « Joey Skaggs a réussi à piéger tous les grands journaux américains avec ses Fat Squad. L'*Inquirer* ne s'est pas fait avoir... » Une phrase qui prend toute sa saveur lorsque l'on sait que ce journal à sensation n'hésite pas à gonfler ses infos et à raconter des faits très divers.

LA PILULE AUX CAFARDS



« Le remède passe par les cafards. » Le docteur Joseph Gregor, entomologiste, diplômé de l'université de Bogota, organise une conférence de presse le 28 mai 1981 pour faire part de sa découverte : les cafards peuvent immuniser contre les radiations et tous les maux dont souffre notre civilisation, de l'acné aux crampes menstruelles. Il a donc mis au point une pilule-miracle composée d'hormones de ces charmants insectes.



Le docteur Gregor a enseigné l'anatomie des cafards sur cette énorme maquette. Plus vraie que nature.

Coiffé d'un chapeau sud-américain, chaussé de lunettes à verres réfléchissants, le docteur Gregor arbore fièrement une paire de bacchantes à faire pâlir de jalousie un guérillero mexicain. Pour éviter toute erreur de traduction ou d'interprétation due à son mauvais anglais, Joseph Gregor porte un magnifique T-shirt blanc frappé d'un énorme cafard sur la poitrine.

70 COMPLICES DANS LA SALLE

Le docteur Gregor explique donc que les études qu'il a effectuées sur les cafards lui ont permis de démontrer la résistance exceptionnelle de cet insecte, notamment face à la radioactivité. Pour s'en persuader, les journalistes n'ont qu'à interroger les quelques soixante-dix personnes présentes (des complices). Elles ont toutes utilisé avec succès sa pilule.

Le lendemain, le *Chicago Tribune*, le *Washington Star*, le *Philadelphia Inquirer*, le *Pittsburgh Press*, le *Daily Times Herald* et une bonne partie des cent soixante-quinze quotidiens clients de l'agence United Press International ne juraient plus que par les cafards. Les télévisions embrayent.

NBC News tient même à le faire venir dans son grand journal *Live at Live*. Les hormones de cafards passent en deuxième sujet. Jack Careful présente son invité comme un homme qui s'est donné la plus noble des missions, et le docteur Joseph Gregor de confirmer : « C'est grâce aux cafards que l'on pourra sauver l'humanité. »

L'HOMME DETRUIT TOUT, LE CAFARD VA LE PROTEGER

D'ailleurs, il a fait des expériences, le professeur... Les résultats sont stupéfiants ! Il a même avec lui un échantillon de ses travaux : deux supers-cafards dans une petite boîte ronde en plastique transparent. Il a assuré lui-même leur développement dans son laboratoire...

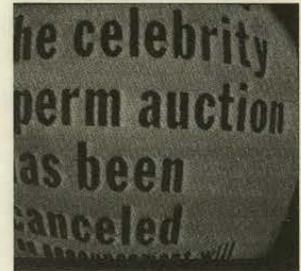
Le présentateur a un sourire contraint. D'un air dégoûté, il souligne que ces bestioles sont bien vivantes. Le docteur Gregor poursuit ses explications tout en manipulant la boîte devant les caméras : « La race humaine est stupide et destructrice. Elle gaspille le sol, l'eau et le pétrole. Le cafard, lui, vit depuis trois cent cinquante millions d'années. Il peut subir cinq cents fois plus de radiations que l'homo sapiens. A Three Miles Island, au moment de l'accident de la centrale nucléaire, les habitants n'auraient même pas eu besoin d'être évacués s'ils avaient pris ces pilules... »

C'est dans la poche ! Jack Careful est convaincu...

En direct sur NBC. Le journaliste montre les cafards géants du docteur Gregor. Brrr !...



Juillet 1976. Un certain Giuseppe Scaggoli fait savoir qu'il vient d'ouvrir une banque du sperme de rock stars. De Dylan à Mick Jagger, beaucoup ont répondu présent à son appel : ils sont prêts à proliférer grâce à l'insémina-

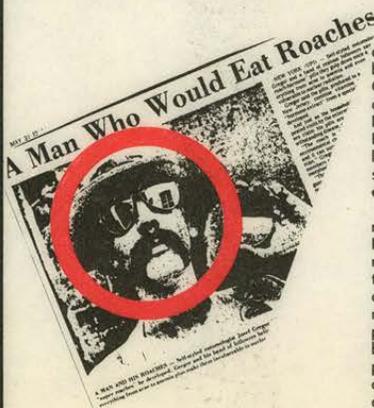


Les enchères du sperme de célébrités sont annulées.

tion artificielle. Des petits Dylan et Jagger partent pour l'an 2000 !

Les périodiques pour midinettes se jettent sur l'information. *Ms Magazine* en tête. Pour faire encore monter la saucisse, Scaggoli promet d'organiser une distribution gratuite de spermatozoïdes de stars pour fêter le bicentenaire de l'Indépendance américaine ! Devant le siège de la banque du sperme à Greenwich Village, c'est l'hystérie des fans. Et pas seulement des fans : des associations de lesbiennes, des conservateurs attachés à la procréation naturelle, des groupes de toutes sortes,

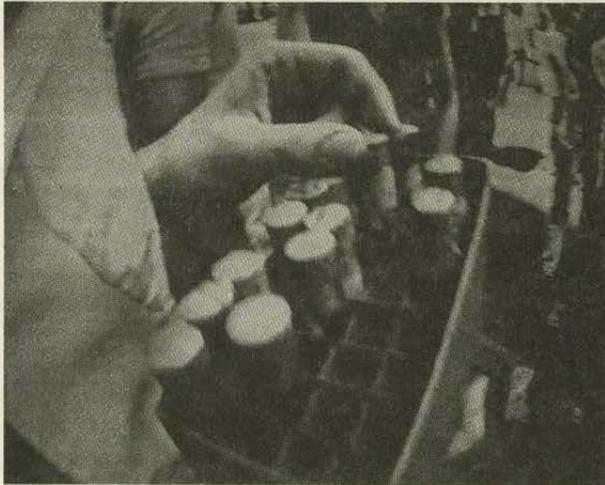
Histoire cafardeuse d'une agence couillonnée



« L'homme qui voulait manger des cafards. » Le titre de la dépêche de l'agence United Press International pouvait passer pour ironique. Eh bien, pas du tout ! Ed Lion, le reporter de l'agence est très sérieux. Conscientieux dans son travail, il s'est rendu à la conférence de presse du docteur Gregor. Il était même accompagné d'un photographe. Résultat : une dépêche dithyrambique sur les hormones de cafards. Pour crédibiliser le tout, Ed Lion donne des chiffres sur la résistance de l'insecte, interroge une brave dame sur les résultats positifs de la pilule sur ses allergies et effectue un compte-rendu des travaux du célèbre entomologiste.

Comme il a l'air sympathique et sérieux, le docteur Gregor lui fait même une confidence : il vient d'ouvrir un institut de recherche dans le New Jersey baptisé « la Métamorphose ». Personne à l'agence ne relève l'énorme clin d'œil à Kafka. La dépêche est envoyée sur tous les téléscripteurs des abonnés. Suite logique : certains journaux comme celui que vous pouvez voir au-dessus, ont publié l'histoire intégralement. Quant au démenti, il n'a plus fallu compter sur UPI. Quatre mois plus tard, l'agence s'est contentée de passer une dépêche sur les bidonnages de la presse en général. UPI ne fait qu'y mentionner au passage sa propre bête. Quand on pense que la plupart des petits canards locaux sont complètement tributaires des agences de presse, ça donne froid dans le dos !

LE SPERME DE MICK JAGGER PRIS EN OTAGE



bien sûr tous des copains à lui. Et des dizaines de journalistes dont le staff de CBS News. Arrive le professeur Scaggoli, la gueule complètement défaite derrière ses lunettes de star, suivi de son avocat. Il présente aux caméras un morceau de papier noirci par des caractères de jour-

naux découpés. « Je dois vous lire ce message », explique-t-il d'une voix larmoyante et rugueuse. Silence inquiet dans l'assistance.

« Salut les groupies, dit la lettre anonyme, je vous y prends avec vos petites culottes sur les chevilles. Chaque éprouvette de sperme vaut



Les kidnappeurs bradent le sperme de Mick.

C'est tout ce qu'il reste dans la banque : du sperme de chanteur de troisième zone.

un million de dollars sur un compte en Suisse. Et c'est ce que ça va vous coûter pour revoir vos futurs bébés vivants. » Murmure dans la foule. Les journalistes essayent d'en savoir plus, mais l'avocat s'interpose : « Messieurs, la banque a été cambriolée cette nuit, c'est tout ce que nous pouvons dire pour l'instant. » Le soir, CBS TV diffuse le reportage suivi d'un éditorial consacré au



« C'est une catastrophe ! Ma sœur sentait déjà dans son ventre la guitare de Dylan... »

vide juridique en la matière : « Peut-on parler de kidnapping à ce stade de la conception ? Existe-t-il une jurisprudence ? » Autant de questions que le commentateur pose à la conscience collective pendant que les quotidiens révisent l'angle de leurs papiers. En effet, quelqu'un dans l'assistance a reconnu la véritable identité de Scaggoli et la presse révèle la supercherie le lendemain. CBS garde le profil bas... Joey Skaggs peut se vanter d'avoir épingle une chaîne de télévision de plus.

QUAND C'EST SERIEUX...



« Mes plantages sont instructifs » : triste morale. Quand Joey Skaggs s'attaque à des sujets tragiques, quand il veut attirer l'attention sur de nobles causes, il ne piège plus que de rares âmes généreuses. Prenons la famine dans le tiers-monde. En 1981, le soir d'Halloween, qui est un peu le deuxième Noël des Américains, Joey invite tous les notables de New York à un grand banquet contre la faim dans le monde. Il leur avait mitonné un ragoût de squelette humain. Il envoie mille invitations. Mais personne n'est venu et il n'y eut rien dans la

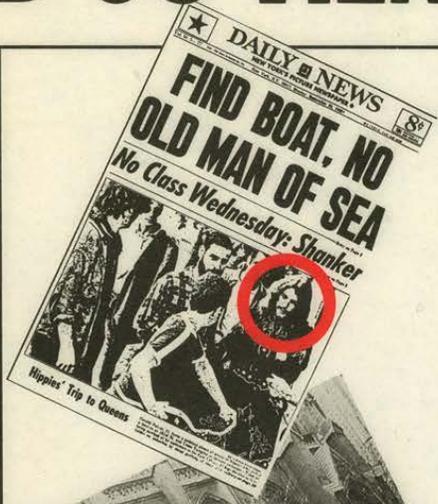


presse. La faim dans le monde intéresse moins que le problème des obèses ! Une autre fois, en juin 1982, il se fait le défenseur des Gitans. Jojo le Gitan, fondateur du GASP (Gypsies Against Sterotypical Propaganda) mène un combat héroïque. Il a tout simplement décidé de lancer un ordre de grève et demande à tous les Gitans de New York de cesser leurs activités pendant une semaine. Plus de ligne de la main, les



voyantes rangent leur boule de cristal et descendent dans la rue... Les Gypsies veulent ainsi protester contre le nom qu'on vient de donner à une nouvelle peste agricole, la « mite gitane ». Toujours prêt à défendre les nobles causes, le *New York Times* se fait bien sûr l'écho de ce cri d'agonie lancé par une minorité opprimée. Mieux : le très sérieux *Wall Street Journal* le suit dans ce combat... Joey ne recommencera pas ce genre de coup : il ne voulait pas piéger seulement les journaux les plus sérieux et les plus généreux...

D'OU VIENT JOEY SKAGGS ?



DEJA DANS LES ANNEES 60, JOEY N'HESITAIT PAS

1966 : LES CATHOLIQUES continuent d'aller tous les dimanches à la messe alors que l'armée américaine se déchaîne au Vietnam. Le jour de Pâques, Joey Skaggs décide de passer à l'action. Comme chaque année, la cathédrale Saint Patrick, sanctuaire des catholiques irlandais, est noire de monde. Joey Skaggs va lui aussi se recueillir. Il est enveloppé dans une grande tunique noire et, tel Jésus sur le chemin de la crucifixion, il porte une énorme croix en bois sur ses épaules. La foule le regarde d'abord interloquée, puis pousse des cris d'effroi : un crâne d'Indien est juché sur le sommet de la croix et un godemiché est planté au bon endroit. Il atterrit au poste. Il recommence chaque année jusqu'en 1969 où les flics devront s'interposer pour lui éviter un lynchage en règle.



NOËL 1968 : JOEY SKAGGS A VINGT-TROIS ANS. NIXON VIENT D'ÊTRE ÉLU, ET LE VIETNAM BRÛLE.

Le jour de Noël, Joey s'installe avec sa bande dans Central Park. Ils ont amené avec eux tout un matériel : bambous, chapeaux chinois, mannequins en mousse et un mouton en peluche pour jouer le rôle des bons bourgeois new-yorkais placides. Sur le gazon apparaissent de petites pagodes vietnamiennes en forme de crèche. Les New-Yorkais regardent la scène sans trop comprendre. Tout à coup, des hurlements ! Un commando de Marines surgit en poussant des cris effroyables. Mitraille au poing, ils canardent les petites crèches avec furie. Panique. La foule s'éparpille dans tous les sens. Un béret vert, la gueule toute peinturlurée, s'approche avec un bidon d'essence, et craque une allumette. Le petit village se transforme en brasier. Quelques-uns trouvent le moyen d'applaudir : « Bravo, ça c'est envoyé ! Faut tous les faire crever ces faces de citron ! »



JOEY SKAGGS A LES CHEVEUX LONGS EN 1968. IL DÉLIRE SEC. SES COPAINS ET LUI TRAINENT LEURS GUÊTRES, LEURS TOILES ET LEURS INSTRUMENTS DE MUSIQUE DANS L'EAST VILLAGE. LE QUARTIER DEVIENT RAPIDEMENT UN HAUT LIEU DE FRÉQUENTATION TOURISTIQUE. ON PREND EN PHOTO TOUTS CES POILUS À FRANGES COMME LES DERNIERS RESCAPÉS D'UNE CIVILISATION POST-MÉROVINGIENNE INCONNUE.

Un jour, Joey décide d'inverser les rôles. Il loue un Greyhound bus et part avec une soixantaine de copains chevelus, visiter le Queens, un quartier de New York middle-class. Le car s'arrête devant les supermarchés et les Mac Do. Les types descendent bardés d'appareils photo et demandent aux autochtones de bien vouloir poser pour eux... L'excursion fait la Une du Daily News.



JOEY SKAGGS EST HIPPIE. IL NE SUPPORTE PLUS L'ARROGANCE DES HELL'S ANGELS. « CES GROS BŒUFS QUI NARGUENT TOUT LE MONDE AVEC LEURS BÉCANES ». JOEY VA SE FOUTRE DE LEUR GUEULE EN ORGANISANT UNE MANIF EN VÉLOS BRICOLÉS FAÇON CHOPPER.

Tout remonte au début des années 60. Influencés par les surréalistes, les artistes américains décident de se moquer de l'Amérique et de remettre en cause tout le système et ses valeurs. Il y a les poètes beatniks, Kerouac et ses clochards célestes, ceux qui vivent en marge, et il y a les grands agitateurs. C'est la période des happenings et du théâtre. Les artistes vont faire l'amour dans le métro pour décoincer le puritanisme, Joey Skaggs porte sa croix pour protester contre l'hypocrisie des catholiques qui ne la portent qu'une fois par an. Au fur et à mesure, c'est toute une génération d'étudiants qui s'y met, le phénomène fait tache d'huile. L'agitation est incroyable.

A San Francisco, le guérilla-théâtre donne naissance à des groupes anarchos généreux comme les Diggers qui organisent des banquets gratuits dans les parcs. A New York, Abbie Hoffman, le plus fameux de ces agitateurs, fait scandale à la Bourse en jetant mille dollars en petites coupures dans la corbeille et en photographiant la mêlée des agents de change qui ramassent les billets. C'est à ce moment-là que l'affaire se corse. Ce genre de provocations narquoises a d'abord choqué, mais lorsque toute une génération semble basculer, la police s'en mêle. Ces agitateurs sont présentés comme des dangers publics. Beaucoup terminent en prison. D'autres vont trop loin, jusqu'à la bombe. Dès 1970, Joey Skaggs s'écarte de ces provocations pour réfléchir à ce que va devenir son Media Art.

QUE VEUT-IL PROUVER ?



Quand même, cher Joey comment expliquez-vous l'étrange dérive de vos actions ? Dans les années 60, des provocations sur des sujets graves, aujourd'hui des sujets plus bouffons, bordels pour chiens...

- Je suis toujours aussi sérieux. L'époque a changé. J'ai choisi d'autres façons de dénoncer l'injustice et l'hypocrisie. On se faisait arrêter et tabasser dans la rue dans les années 60, et on mettait le peuple américain en colère. Je crois qu'on est devenu plus malins, en les faisant rire. En plus, ce qui était choquant ne choque plus personne en ce moment. Les gens pensent à leur réussite individuelle, la conscience de l'époque est ainsi...

- Résignation ?

- Non. Je m'explique. Mes impostures n'ont pas toutes

pour but de contester ou de révéler un état de la société. Je fais du Media Art.

- C'est-à-dire ?

- Je veux retourner les méthodes les plus criticables des médias contre eux-mêmes. Les médias nous manipulent par le choix et le traitement qu'ils font de l'information. Je leur renvoie la balle, de l'extérieur. Ils n'éditorialisent que ce qu'ils veulent bien. Je montre le genre de sujets qu'ils sont avides de traiter. Il m'arrive aussi de rendre service à des amis, des écrivains ou des artistes, qui ont peur des médias. Je sais vers qui les orienter, comment essayer de limiter la casse pour eux, les conseiller pour qu'ils arrivent à faire passer quelque chose qui leur tient à cœur. La plupart des présentateurs de télé sont condescendants vis-à-vis du public, du genre il faut être simple pour tous ces crétins, et ils ont la même attitude face à leurs invités. Ils te demandent rien de ce qui compte pour toi. Avec

mes coups, je traite la machine médiatique comme elle traite les autres. Ils ne sont pas tous de la classe de Sherlock Holmes, beaucoup sont des bacleurs. Non content de piéger certains journalistes une fois, je les ai vus revenir et se faire piéger par un nouveau déguisement. Les reporters de l'information quotidienne américaine sont speedés par la concurrence, ils ont toujours peur de rater un coup, ils ne prennent donc pas toujours le temps de vérifier et surtout ils oublient jour après jour la tête de ceux qu'ils ont interviewés. Ne sont-ils plus que des entonneurs à bouillie pour les chats ?

- Mais tous les médias ne sont pas comme ça ?

- Bien entendu. Il y en a qui sont sérieux, des journalistes super que je ne souhaite pas piéger, mais même eux pratiquent parfois certaines méthodes regrettables. Prends la notion de rectificatif. Tu publies un truc faux sur quelqu'un, en gros tu détruis sa vie en page 1 et après tu publies le rectificatif en petit dans un coin. Le mal est fait, le dénigrement, ou la fausse info, est passé. En plus, si tu protestes tu as l'air d'un râleur. Tu as l'air sur la défensive...

- Tu crois que ça va empirer ? Avec les nouvelles technologies, le faux et le simulateur vont devenir de plus en plus dangereux.

- Hélas oui. Avec le traitement d'images par computers, on pourra montrer un faux film d'Hitler vieilli sur une plage d'Argentine. Tu connais Nancy Burson qui arrive à vieillir des photos d'identité par computers ? Alors crois-moi, le problème de la morale de l'information et des communications est un problème-clé de l'avenir. Objectivité, vérification, scepticisme. Qui les punit, les médias, quand ils se trompent ?

- Il y a un exemple en Europe. Après l'affaire des faux carnets de Hitler les ventes de Stern en Allemagne ont baissé de 15 à 20 %.

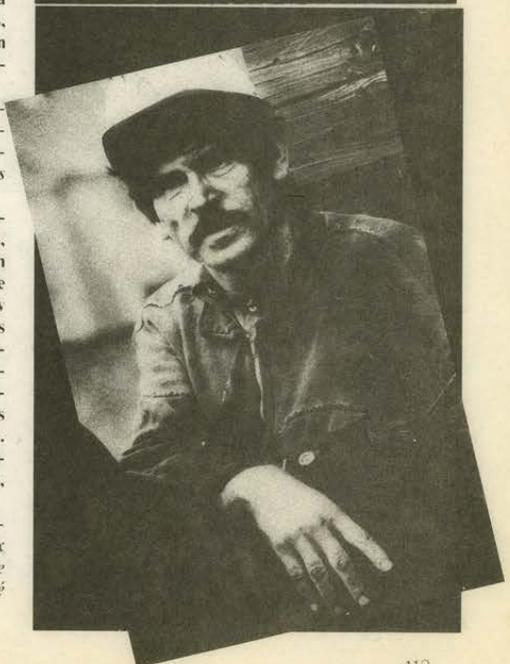
- Ha ! »

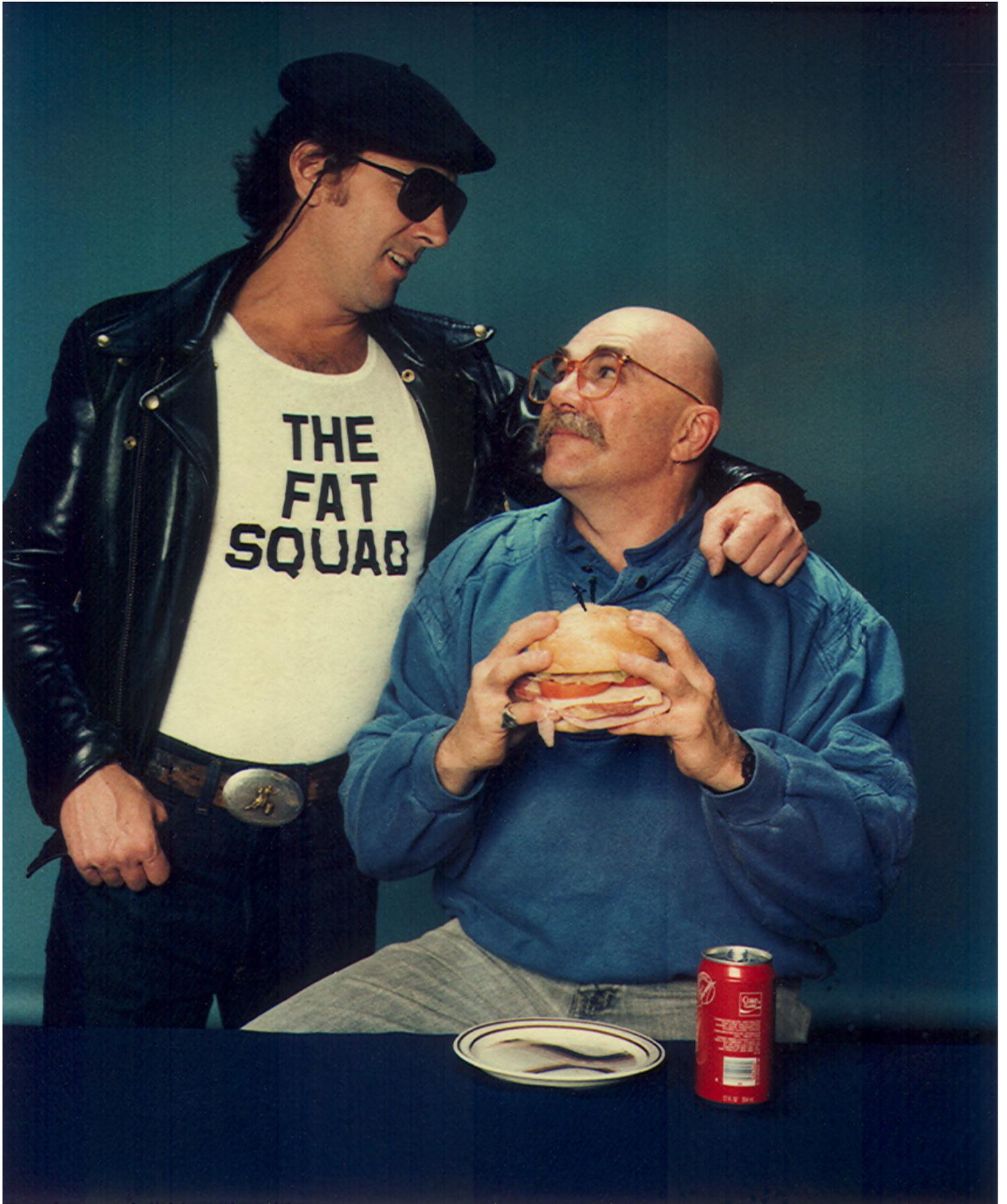
WALLRAFF : IMPOSTEUR PAR COMPASSION

On ne présente plus Günter Wallraff, le journaliste le plus célèbre d'Allemagne, maître incontesté de l'imposture militante, auteur du best-seller *Ganz unten* (Tout en bas), traduit en français par *Tête de Turc*, où il raconte son dernier exploit : les deux années qu'il a passé sous le nom d'Ali, avec une perruque et des lentilles de contact noires, dans l'enfer des esclaves turcs de l'Allemagne moderne. Un succès extraordinaire, inattendu (deux millions d'exemplaires en RFA, six cent mille en France, vingt-deux traductions). D'autant plus inattendu que beaucoup de ses admirateurs croyaient Wallraff « brûlé », « fini », depuis son incroyable imposture au *Bild*, en 1974-75 quand, pendant des mois, il était devenu Hans Esser, journaliste d'un des journaux les plus crapuleux d'Europe (record des ventes de quotidiens en Allemagne). Cette imposture lui avait permis de livrer au grand jour les procédés peu ragoûtants de la presse à scandales d'Axel Springer. Mais du coup, toute la droite allemande avait juré la perte de ce Zorro insupportablement déterminé et sérieux. Et voilà que dix ans plus tard, le même...

On ne présente plus Günter Wallraff, et pourtant on ne sait pas grand chose du personnage caché derrière ces multiples masques.

Il est né en 1942. Son père était ou-▶





l'Écho des Savanes

QU'EST-CE QUI FAIT RÂLER LES FILLES ?

*... et tout ce qu'il ne faut
pas faire pour les séduire
une fois pour toutes !*



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▶ *Le pirate des médias...*

JOEY SKAGGS "J'ai toujours su histoires capables de faire la une et des grands networks."

Une banque de sperme de stars et de prix Nobel, un parc d'attractions sur la Mort, des bordels pour chiens... Joey Skaggs, depuis son site Internet et avec quelques complices, passe sa vie à lancer les impostures les plus incroyables. Tout le monde gobe, les médias américains les premiers, qui le détestent cordialement. Une bonne raison de le trouver sympathique...

En 1976, les New-Yorkais ouvrent leur *Village Voice* et trébuchent sur une annonce insolite : un bordel pour chiens va ouvrir ! Pour 50 dollars TTC, une brochette des cochonnes les plus chaudes de la ville sera offerte en pâture aux bêtes à poils. Un grand nombre d'articles de presse vantent l'ouverture prochaine et l'annonce fait mouche. Un flot d'appels s'ensuit, certains mamelouks souhaitant des rapports avec des toutous consentants, d'autres préférant se la jouer voyeur. Une équipe de WABC-TV est immédiatement dépêchée sur

les lieux et diffuse un reportage. Les services administratifs s'en mêlent, du Bureau des affaires animales à la Brigade des mœurs de la police de New York, en passant par le maire. Les autorités décident de fermer ce lieu de perdition canine... Mais quelques jours plus tard, bang ! Le "patron" du bordel, Joey Skaggs, donne une conférence de presse – un 1^{er} avril – et révèle que l'affaire a été montée de toutes pièces avec la collaboration de 25 acteurs et 15 chiens dans un loft de SoHo ! Mais pourquoi tant de bruit pour rien ? Pour dénoncer la naïveté du public face à la dictature des médias. Pour montrer du doigt le manque de professionnalisme et accessoirement de déontologie des organes dits d'information, prêts à gober n'importe quelle couleuvre pour faire du sensationnel.

Honteuse, ABC ne s'est même pas excusée d'avoir très sérieusement relayé l'information dans toutes ses éditions.

Depuis, Joey Skaggs, consultant médias, professeur de collègue, peintre et sculpteur accompli, n'a cessé d'accumuler les impostures les plus incroyables, faisant tomber à chaque fois l'*establishment* dans le panneau. Des pointures comme le *New York Times*, le *Washington Post*, le *Boston Globe*, le *Chicago Tribune*, le *Wall Street Journal*, l'agence de presse Reuter, *People*, CNN, ABC, CBS et NBC sont ainsi tombés dans le panneau des multiples pièges tendus par l'ami Skaggs.

Un véritable empêcheur de publier et d'informer en rond, ce type... ☺ **Fabien Teillard**

En mai 1994, Joey Skaggs crée Kea So Joo, Inc., une "société" qui récupère les chiens indésirables pour 10 \$ et les transforme en plats comestibles. Un canular mémorable...



Joey Skaggs, racontez-nous à quoi vous passez vos journées exactement ?

Je suis un artiste qui utilise les médias pour les confronter à leurs propres certitudes. On nous ment en permanence et j'essaie de l'illustrer avec

humour, satire et controverse. Je crée et j'élabore de fausses réalités pour les tromper avec le public. J'ai toujours su pondre des histoires capables de faire la une des journaux et des grands networks.

D.R.

pondre des ne des journaux

Pourquoi vous être lancé dans ce genre d'exercices ?

Nous vivons une époque où tout semble n'être qu'une mauvaise plaisanterie. L'an 2000 et la fin du monde, le Viagra qui ressuscite les morts, la possibilité de cloner son animal de compagnie décédé... Lorsque la réalité est à ce point étrange, les farceurs sont une nécessité pour nous inciter à réévaluer l'échelle de nos valeurs.

Comment expliquez-vous le succès immédiat de vos arnaques ?

Nous sommes tous prêts à nous faire rouler dans la farine. Petits, notre comportement est naïf. Adultes, nos croyances sont naïves. La souris qui vient chercher notre dent, le père Noël et le croque-mitaine font partie de notre inconscient. On nous demande constamment de croire ce qu'on nous raconte, notre capacité à critiquer et à analyser est totalement annihilée. C'est pourquoi nous croyons tout ce qui passe à la télé et dans les journaux. D'où le succès de mes arnaques.

Une arnaque réussie, c'est quoi ?

Un mélange d'éléments véridiques, d'ironie, d'humour et de satire pour dénoncer la *statu quo* et attaquer les abus de pouvoir des médias, du gouvernement, de l'argent et de la religion. Il ne s'agit pas d'arnaquer financièrement de pauvres cloches, plutôt de leur ouvrir les yeux.

Vous vous sentez investi d'une mission particulière ?

Les arnaqueurs ont toujours été culturellement importants. Notre réalité devenant de moins en moins significative, il est plus important que jamais de commettre des arnaques dans un esprit toujours positif. Nous devons être capables de nous regarder en face et de rire de nous-mêmes.

Vos actions ont-elles changé quelque chose ?

Je n'ai pas vraiment constaté de changement. Et tant mieux. J'ai toujours aimé provoquer et j'espère que mon travail continuera à intéresser, à choquer et à nourrir les discussions. L'acceptation passive est la mort de tout artiste qui se respecte.

Avez-vous espoir de voir les médias retenir enfin la leçon ?

A moins de voir les mentalités et l'attitude des gens changer du tout au tout, je ne vois pas comment les choses pourraient changer. On ne peut pas se contenter de blâmer les médias. Nous sommes ceux qui consommons et qui cautionnons leurs activités. Pour la plupart, ils donnent aux masses ce qu'elles attendent.

Y a-t-il des coups auxquels vous avez renoncé ?

J'élimine ce qui n'est pas drôle, ce qui est irresponsable, illégal ou qui riquerait de mettre en danger la vie des autres. Quand j'ai imaginé la société Kea So Joo, Inc., qui transformait soi-disant les chiens en aliments, de nombreuses personnes cherchaient à se faire la peau du propriétaire, en l'occurrence moi ! Je prends garde à être le seul exposé en première ligne.

Depuis une heure, on est en train de bavarder par e-mails. Comment être certain que vous êtes bien Joey Skaggs et qu'un charlatan n'a pas pris votre place pour répondre à cette interview ?

Damned ! Vous êtes bien le premier à vouloir le vérifier ! En fait, je suis Ronald Reagan ! Je m'ennuie tellement que je n'ai pas résisté à vous faire cette petite blague avant de perdre définitivement la mémoire ! Plutôt réussi, non ?

Propos recueillis par F.T.

www.joeyskaggs.com

25 ans de manipulations médiatiques

Depuis vingt-cinq ans qu'il joue à cache-cache avec les médias US, Joey Skaggs leur a vraiment tout fait avaler. Plus c'est gros, plus ça marche !

Des spermatozoïdes de stars aux enchères

Juillet 76 : Giuseppe Scaggoli (Joey Skaggs) fonde la "Banque du sperme des célébrités" et organise des enchères ! Y sont mises à prix les semences de Jagger, Dylan, Lennon, McCartney et



Hendricks. Une cinquantaine d'acteurs sont mis dans la confidence. De nombreux passants s'y arrêtent, la police s'en mêle. Skaggs finit par annoncer que le sperme a été volé. La vente est annulée. L'histoire est diffusée dans tous les médias US. Une jolie satire des avancées médicales et de l'intérêt vicelard des médias pour des histoires liées au sexe.

Des flics anti-calories dans votre cuisine

En 1986, Joe Bones (Joey Skaggs) lance "The Fat Squad", un commando qui se propose de lutter contre votre propre graisse. Pour 300 \$ par jour (soit plus de 2000 F, rien que ça !), les "soldats" de cette unité très spéciale suivent l'intéressé 24h/24 pour veiller à ce



qu'il respecte son régime à la lettre. L'usage de la force le cas échéant est même légitimé par contrat ! Le *Philadelphia Enquirer* et le *Washington Post* sont parmi les premiers à tomber dans le panneau.

Un marabout pour soigner le stress

En 1995, Joey Skaggs se rend en Angleterre et se fait passer pour "Baba Wa Simba", guérisseur itinérant. Grâce à une nouvelle thérapie, il propose aux Anglais d'exorciser leur stress et leurs peurs en révélant l'animal qui est caché en eux. Sa technique : les faire rugir et bouger comme un lion. La BBC, le *Good Morning TV*, le *London Tonight*, *Sky TV News* et *The East London Advertiser* tombent dans le piège qui voit des personnalités télé adulées outre-Manche se rouler par terre en rugissant. Aucune excuses publiques ne furent formulées. En swahili, "Baba Wa Simba" signifie le "Roi Lion". Et en plus, il a de l'humour...



En 1998, avec l'aide d'écrivains, d'artistes et de designers, il imagine un site Internet, "The Final Curtain" (le baisser de rideau). L'idée : un réseau mondial de parcs d'attractions avec merchandising à la Disney pour honorer nos morts.

Un parc d'attractions... de la Mort

Le but ? Botter les fesses des cimetières et crématoriums et évidemment de concurrencer les parcs Disney. Tout est pensé, réfléchi dans les détails... et gobé par le public, les rois de la finance et les grands médias. Hollywood se propose même de faire un film. En mai dernier, Skaggs dévoile le pot aux roses. Son dernier bras d'honneur en date.





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MONACUL
MONAFRIC**

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QU'IL SUCE MAL!»**

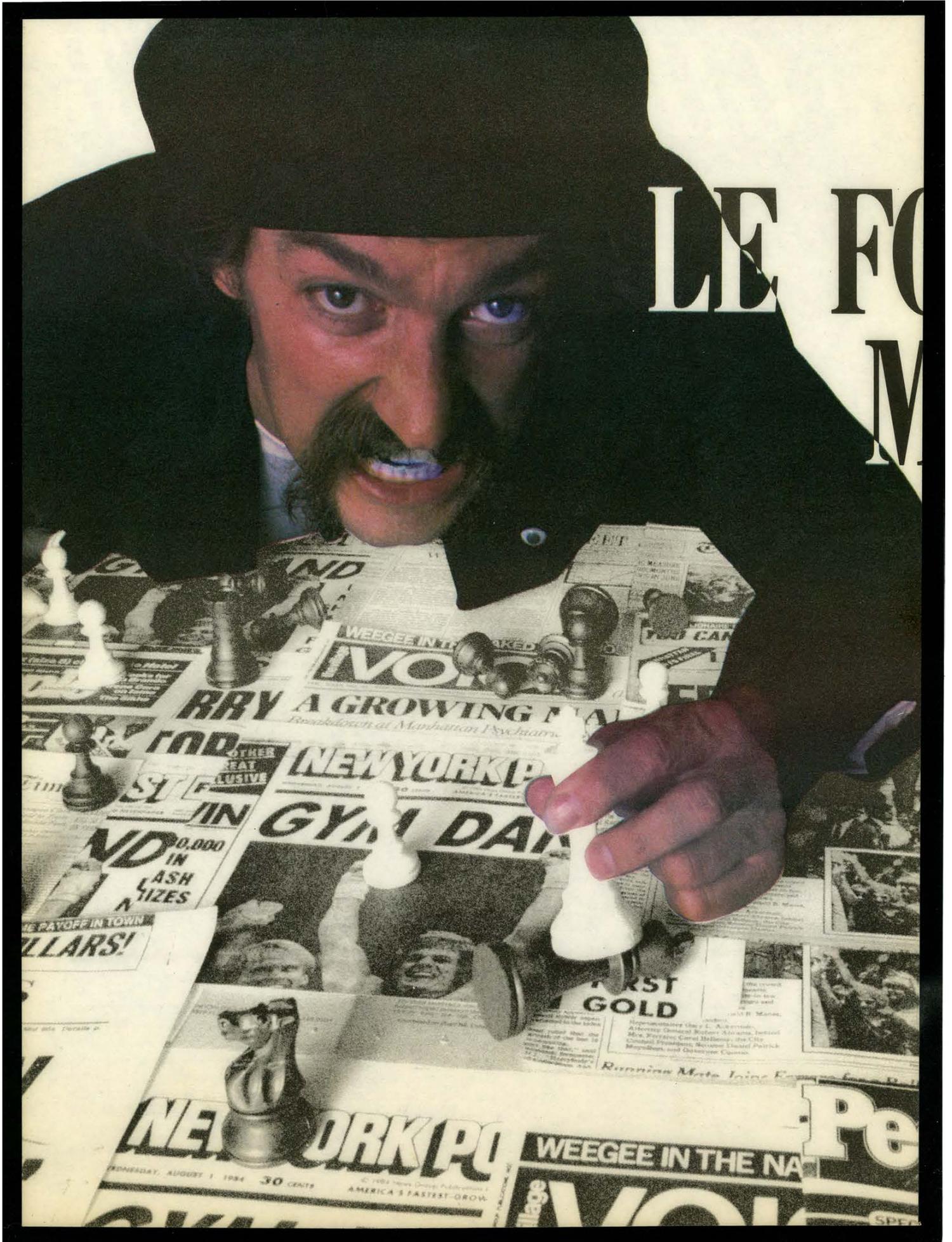
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Joe Skaggs est génial. Il a inventé les bordels pour chiens, la banque du sperme de rock-stars et les hormones révolutionnaires à base de cafards : toutes ces créations ont fait la Une des médias. Mais tous ces scoops sont des faux. Ça fait dix ans que Joe ridiculise télé et journaux américains. Ses canulars démontrent qu'en publiant n'importe quelle information sans la vérifier, les médias nous désinforment quotidiennement.

DU QUI TIENT LES MÉDIAS EN ECHEC

Je le souhaite pas, notez bien, mais un de ces quat'matins, ça se pourrait qu'on retrouve ce brave Joey au fond de l'Hudson, une braguette grande ouverte en travers de la gorge et les pieds pris dans des charentaises en béton. Je dis ça, c'est pas pour lui porter la poisse, mais ça, malheureusement, ça risque bien d'arriver. Alors, si un jour ça arrive, tant qu'à faire, passez me voir, lieutenant !

On s'en jettera un. Je vous raconterai sa vie. Et puis, va savoir, peut-être même je vous mettrai sur une piste.

Et puis, attention, pas des charlots, pas de la petite frappe descendue du South Bronx ou remontée de Brooklyn. Non. Des sérieux. Avocats de concours. Appuis politiques. Peut-être même relations dans la magistrature.

Je vous souhaite, lieutenant : WABC TV, *New York Magazine*, le bureau du procureur général de l'Etat de New York, United International et les centaines de quotidiens qu'ils arrosent, NBC TV, le *NY Times*, le *Village Voice*, CBS TV...

Ce brave Joey, lieutenant : « la terreur des médias », « le roi de l'embrouille », « le Mozart de l'arnaque », « professeur baratin », « le farceur fou du Washington Square », « l'empereur du piège à cons », Joey Skaggs, alias Guiseppe Scaggoli, alias Jo-Jo le gitan, alias D. Josef Gregor, alias sir Joseph Bucks (en argot, *buck* = dollar), l'homme qui a vengé Salengro et toutes les victimes de la presse irresponsable, tous ceux qu'un pisse-copie a un jour calomniés pour faire mousser sa prose. Le jour où un de ces fumiers aura enfin réussi à le coincer, passez me voir lieutenant, je vous en raconterai de belles.

SIGNÉ JOEY SKAGGS

Joey est né, il y a trente-neuf ans de ça, à New York. Son père grattait dans un garage. Vu que Joey était doué à un point que c'en était un péché, on le sélectionne pour aller étudier à la Manhattan High School of Art and Design. Là, il reçoit une formation en béton. Il sort de là, il sait tout faire depuis les graffitis de chiottes jusqu'aux Vénus néoclassiques en passant par les faux papiers. On le retrouve dans l'East Village avec les beatniks. Les hippies remplacent les beatniks. Joey, lui, est *Speed Freak*. Il barbouille et joue de l'*Acid Rock* pun-koïde et proto-métal, voyez ce que je veux dire, lieutenant ! Le quartier tarde pas à devenir un haut lieu touristique, les blaireaux d'alors viennent prendre les hirsutes en photo. C'est comme ça qu'en 1968, Joey a l'idée de sa première farce. Il loue un Greyhound Bus et organise une visite guidée du Queens, banlieue *middle class* moche. Et le voilà parti avec soixante hippies choisis parmi les plus velus et débraillés à la découverte de Lumpen City. Imaginez les gugusses en train de prendre des photos des McDo, des supermarchés et de demander aux beaufs de bien vouloir poser pour eux. L'aventure fait la Une du *Daily News*.

Ce jour-là, Joey a découvert quelque chose. Les médias ! Voilà une tribune, les mois qui suivent, on ne tarde pas à entendre parler de lui, généralement à date fixe, puisque Joey fait preuve d'un sens aigu du calendrier.

A Noël, par exemple, lui et ses potes, déguisés en marines, vont mitrailler et incendier les crèches vietnamiennes qu'ils ont installées un peu partout dans Central Park.

A Pâques, Joey ne manque pas de venir, une croix ornée d'un crâne d'Indien et d'un godemiché, autour de la cathédrale St Patrick. Les flics doivent le protéger de la foule en colère. Au coin de la 5^e et de la 49^e.

Dans le même ordre d'idée, le jour de *Thanks giving*, il organise des dégustations de dinde sur des tables dressées autour de squelettes d'enfants et encerclées par des posters de petits Biafrais. Personne n'ose mastiquer.

Hey, voyez lieutenant, il se rend populaire !

CHATIÈRES POUR CHIENS

En janvier 1976, le *Village Voice* publiait l'annonce suivante : « Payez un petit coup de queue à votre toutou. Pour 50 dollars, faites plaisir à votre meilleur ami. The Cthouse for Dogs propose une superbe sélection de chiennes lubriques. Tous styles représentés depuis Fifi la caniche de Paris jusqu'à Lady the Tramp, la belle clocharde. Maîtres chiens et vétérinaires appointés. Photos contre enveloppe timbrée. Détraqués s'abstenir. Chiens uniquement. Sur R.V. »

Le jour même, le téléphone commençait à sonner : « Allô, Cthouse for Dogs, j'écoute.

— Allô. J'ai un berger allemand qui aime les pékinois. Est-ce que vous croyez que... ?

— Je vous mets en liste d'attente. On est déjà complet pour le mois. »

« Allô, Cthouse for Dogs, j'écoute.

— Rex n'arrête pas de se frotter contre ma jambe. Vous croyez que je devrais vous l'amener ?

— Certainement. Votre Rex m'a tout l'air d'avoir des picotements où je pense. Le problème, c'est qu'on est surbookés jusqu'à la fin du mois, je vous mets en attente. »

« Allô, Cthouse for Dogs, j'écoute.

— Allô. Dites-moi, votre caniche de Paris, là. Elle fait les... heu... comment dire... les gâteries à la française ?

— A vos risques et périls et à ceux de votre chien. Vous nous signez une décharge, on peut essayer de s'arranger. Mais la maison n'est pas responsable des accidents éventuels. »

Et puis, bien sûr, même si elle leur demandait de s'abstenir, la moitié des quatre cents appels reçus provenaient des zarebis à qui l'annonce en avait inspiré des pas tristes.

L'appel le plus obscène restera celui-ci :

« Allô, Cthouse for Dogs, j'écoute.

— Hi..., c'est WABC TV à l'appareil. On aimerait bien faire un sujet sur votre bordel pour clebs. C'est possible ?

— Heu... (hurlement de triomphe héroïquement réprimé)... Faut voir. Vous feriez ça quand ?

Bingo.

Ils avaient mordu.

Le jour dit, une équipe vint filmer les pensionnaires de Joey tenus en laisse par des copines à lui. L'interview valait son pesant de Jelly Beans :

« Vos... employées, vous les recrutez comment ?

— Je les loue à des particuliers. Ils touchent 10 dollars par passe. Le chien touche la même somme convertie en Canigou. Le reste me revient, déduction faite de mes frais.

— Une passe, ça se déroule comment ?

— Nos chiennes prennent la pilule. Grâce à des injections d'Estradil, elles peuvent avoir leurs chaleurs à volonté. Nous les tenons ici, dans le salon. Les chiens viennent les inspecter. Dès qu'une des « filles » est choisie, elle s'isole avec le client dans l'une des niches. Si le propriétaire du client le désire, il peut assister à la passe et prendre des photos.

— Vraiment ? »

Le reportage fut diffusé au journal de cinq heures, puis réutilisé dans un documentaire consacré aux sévices subis par les animaux. Les revues de cul reprirent toute l'information, suivies de quelques quotidiens « sérieux ».

Enfin, ce qui devait arriver arriva : la SPA s'émut, plainte fut déposée et Louis J. Lefkowitz, attorney général de New York convoqua Joey — accrochez-vous : convoqua Joey pour le 1^{er} avril 1976 ! Chef d'accusation : proxénétisme.

Détail succulent, entretemps, WABC TV avait reçu un prix pour son reportage sur Joey et la « Chatière pour Chiens ».

Le 1^{er} avril, toutes les télévisions, toutes les radios, tous les quotidiens, toutes les agences encombraient le bureau de l'attorney. Joey arrive. Les caméras le braquent, les micros l'encerclent. Il attend un instant, s'assurant que tout le monde voit bien, puis, posément, déboutonne sa veste. Apparaît alors un superbe T-shirt rouge, à l'effigie de Snoopy et barré du fin mot de toute l'affaire : April Fool. Poisson d'avril ! La foule éclate de rire, à l'exception bien sûr du staff d'ABC News tout à coup bien encombré par sa récompense (la chaîne n'apportera aucun démenti et sera la seule le soir même à ne pas se faire l'écho du coup de théâtre de la matinée). A l'exception aussi du procureur qui, ne sachant trop quoi faire, retient Joey cinq minutes, juste le temps de le déclarer innocent des accusations portées contre lui.

Pourtant c'est pas fini. Deux livres sur les chiens tout ce qu'il y a de bien documentés s'obtiennent encore aujourd'hui à consacrer une ou deux pages au scandaleux bordel pour cabots de Joey Skaggs.

Hey, lieutenant ! mine de rien, ça vous fait déjà quelques suspects. Les mecs de WABC TV, les mecs qui leur ont voté la récompense, ceux qu'ont repiqué l'histoire dans d'autres canards. Hey, sur le nombre que ça fait, m'étonnerait pas qu'il s'en trouve un pour lui avoir gardé un chien de sa chienne !

LE SPERME DES VEDETTES

Sans compter que trois mois plus tard, comme si ça suffisait pas, Joey allait chercher des crosses à CBS. Début juillet, un certain Guiseppe Scaggoli avait fait savoir qu'il ouvrait une banque de sperme alimentée par les Rock-Stars.

Là encore, le téléphone n'avait pas tardé à sonner :

« Scaggoli, Sperme de Vedettes Incorporated, j'écoute.

— Allô. Heu... Voilà, je m'appelle Kay, j'habite Des Moines dans l'Iowa. J'ai déjà deux enfants, mais aucun des deux n'est doué pour la musique. Or, voyez, moi, mon rêve, ce serait d'avoir un fils musicien, voyez ? C'est pour ça, je voulais savoir combien ça me coûterait pour une dose de John.

— Oh ! là, là ! John ?... John, on est manquant, là. La demande est trop forte, comparez, je refuse des propositions à 15 000 dollars ces jours-ci. John, rien à faire avant six mois. Au moins ! Au mieux !

— Et Mick ?

— Pareil. Mick, John, Keith et Bob, pas la peine d'y penser avant l'année prochaine. Mais là, j'attends une grosse livraison de Paul. Je peux vous mettre sur la liste, si vous voulez.

— Paul ? Ouais. Ça irait chercher dans les combien à peu près ?

— Paul ? tendez voir ! Gros donneur, Paul ! Reste très abordable ! Entre 3 500 et 5 000.

— Wouah ! Super ! Quand c'est que vous avez dit que ça arrivait ?

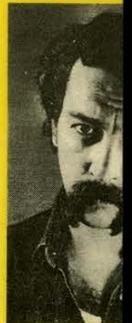
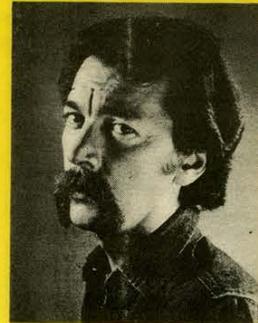
— Sais pas. Ces jours-ci. Ça devrait déjà être là. Maintenant, vous savez, le temps que ça vienne d'Angleterre, que ça passe la douane et tout ça... »

Comme ça toute la journée :

— « Allô, c'était pour savoir si vous auriez pas une giclée de Dylan en rabe ? »

Et ça turlutait pas que de New York ! D'Alaska, ça

WANT BAD GUYS



IMPOSTOR/MASTER

YURMO

Aliases: JOKER, KING OF HEARTS,
DESCR

Date of Birth: OCTOBER 4, 1945

Place of Birth: NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Height: 6'

Weight: 155 POUNDS

Build: WIRY

Hair: BROWN

Occupations: UNKNOWN

Scars and Marks: UNKNOWN

NCIC: 0805TT020307AAA

CAUTION

BE ON GUARD AT ALL TIMES. THE "JOKER" TREATS LIFE ORGANIC TV TO PLEASE OTHER LIFE FORMS. THIS CAN CONTACT WITH HIM. HAS ROMANTIC IMAGE OF SELF AS IF YOU WANT INFORMATION CONCERNING BAD GUYS CONTACT YOUR LOCAL BAD GUYS OFFICE. TEL: 107 WEVERLY PLACE NY

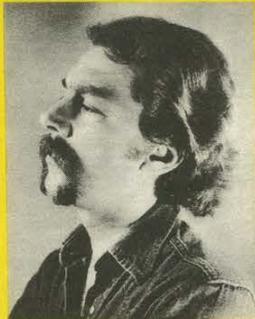
appelait ! Même des fois de Hawaï ! Le jour où *Ms Magazine* (l'équivalent de *Biba* ou *20 ans* ici), s'est senti obligé de mettre ses jeunes lectrices au courant, ça n'a rien arrangé.

Enfin Scaggoli fit savoir que dans la foulée des cérémonies du bicentenaire et afin de contribuer à l'essor musical de son pays, il organiserait le 26 juillet 1976 une grande journée du sperme de stars au cours de laquelle il procéderait, en présence de quelques donateurs prestigieux, à une distribution gratuite de tubes et d'éprouvettes. L'événement aurait lieu en face des locaux de la Sperme de Vedettes Incorporated, Downtown Manhattan.

Le jour dit, la rue était noire de monde. Des associations de lesbiennes ravies de pouvoir enfin enfanter sans devoir supporter le contact d'un homme, des représentants de « laissez-les vivre » venus apporter leur soutien à ce singulier nataliste, tous évidemment joués par les potes de Joey. Mais aussi, pas mal de badauds, des profs d'université, spécialistes de l'insémination artificielle, des fils embarrassés par toute cette foule, trois douzaines de journalistes et puis, bien sûr, les rois de la journée, CBS TV News.

Enfin, on voit sortir Guiseppe Scaggoli et son avo-

ED BY THE FBI YS INC.



OF DISGUISES

MMAS

THE CHAMELEON, MAVERICK
PTION

Eyes: BROWN

Complexion: FAIR

Race: CAUCASIAN

Nationality: AMERICAN

Remarks: SMOOTH TALKING LADY'S MAN. DEVIOUSLY
DECEPTIVE. BECOMES VIOLENT IF SERVED TOFU, CAN-
NED CORN OR LIMA BEANS. A CREATIVE MASTERMIND.
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NY 10011 (212) 260-6371 JOEY SKAGGS

cat. « J'ai une déclaration à faire, dit-il d'une voix aussi
blanche que ses lunettes sont noires, je dois d'abord vous
lire cette lettre. » Il présente aux caméras une feuille
recouverte de caractères découpés dans les journaux et
il attaque : « Salut les groupies. Je vous y prends, coqui-
nes, à écarter les jambes. Chacune de ces petites boutan-
ches vaut une brique sur un compte en Suisse. Voilà ce
que ça vous coûtera si vous voulez revoir "votre" enfant
vivant. Signé : l'ennemi public. »

Murmures dans l'assistance, remous. Vous l'avez com-
pris, reprend Scaggoli, la Banque du Sperme a été cam-
briolée cette nuit. C'est tout pour l'instant. »

La presse cherche à en savoir plus, mais l'avocat s'in-
terpose. Le soir CBS diffuse le reportage. L'expert juri-
dique de la chaîne se fend même d'un petit édit sur le
thème : « Peut-on parler de rapt d'enfant quand on kid-
nappe des spermatozoïdes ? Existe-t-il une jurispru-
dence ? » Evidemment, quelqu'un reconnaît Joey. Le len-
demain, l'ensemble de la presse révèle la véritable iden-
tité de Scaggoli et CBS rase les murs. Hey, lieutenant,
voulez mon avis, m'étonnerait pas qu'un de ces mecs lui
en veuille encore de leur avoir fait ces enfants dans le dos.
Croyez pas ?

LE CAFARD QUI SAUVE

Encore que là, c'est rien, mais pensez un peu aux enne-
mis qu'il s'est fait avec le coup de la pilule à l'hormone
de cafard.

Cette fois, c'était en 1981, en plein pendant la folie des
sectes, et du revival de la parano nucléaire. Un certain
docteur Josef Gregor, entomologiste diplômé de l'uni-
versité de Bogota donna une conférence de presse : au
terme d'expériences menées sur les cafards, il avait réussi
à isoler une hormone spéciale capable de soigner certai-
nes douleurs comme les crampes menstruelles et même
d'immuniser l'être humain contre les radiations atomi-
ques. Gregor révéla par la même occasion qu'il avait
ouvert un institut de recherche baptisé « La Métamor-
phose » et qu'il soignait ou traitait déjà près de cinq cents
personnes. Soixante-dix patients étaient d'ailleurs présents
et répondirent avec bonne volonté à toutes les questions
que la presse crût utile de leur poser.

Ed Lion, reporter à l'UPI, rédigea le jour même un
article enthousiaste intitulé « Cet homme mange des
cafards ». Les deux cents Américains de son agence repro-
duirent l'article sans sourciller. WNBC ne voulut pas être
en reste. On consacra un spécial au docteur Gregor. Il
vint même en direct présenter ses cafards géants au jour-
nal du soir. Un mois après, *People* et le *Wall Street Jour-
nal* se firent un plaisir de révéler la vérité : Joey Skaggs
avait encore frappé. *People*, publication pourtant insoup-
çonnable d'élitisme culturel et de surenchère à l'érudition,
poussa même la cruauté jusqu'à rappeler à la concurrence
qu'un certain Kafka avait un jour raconté l'histoire d'un
dénomé Gregor qui, page après page, se transforme en
insecte. Titre de l'ouvrage : *La Métamorphose*. CQFD.

L'UPI et NBC endurèrent le blâme sans broncher. On
attend encore leur *errata*, démentis et autres mises au
point.

Hey, lieutenant ! NBC, plus tous les clients de l'UPI,
je voudrais pas dire, mais ça vous en rajoute un bon
paquet.

PROFESSEUR SKAGGS ET JO-JOLE GITAN

Depuis quatre ans, le plus sérieusement du monde, Joey
enseigne la manipulation de médias à l'université de New
York et donne des conférences partout où on l'invite.
Qu'on se rassure : il n'a pas laissé tomber les travaux pra-
tiques pour autant. D'une part, en 1981, il a réussi à faire
croire qu'il allait traverser le Pacifique en planche à voile.
Et puis surtout, il y a deux ans, il s'est débrouillé pour
accrocher les scalps du *New York Times* et du *Wall Street
Journal* à sa ceinture.

Se faisant cette fois passer pour Jo-Jo le Gitan, fon-
dateur du GASP (!) — Gypsies Against Stereotypical
Propaganda — il adressa aux Gitans de New York un mot
d'ordre de grève leur enjoignant de suspendre pendant
une semaine la lecture des lignes de la main, des tarots
ou du marc de café. Motif invoqué : protester contre le
nom donné à une nouvelle peste agricole, la « mite
gitane ». Jo-Jo et une horde de Gitans à peu près aussi
Gitans que lui, allèrent même manifester en face du palais

du gouverneur. Jo-Jo passa à la télé et à la radio tandis
que le *Wall Street Journal* et le *NY Time* (qui n'en rate
pas une dès qu'il s'agit de jouer les saintes Thérèse) l'in-
tervuaient et applaudissaient à longueur de colonnes le
défenseur farouche des droits civiques et des minorités
opprimées.

Le *NY Times*. Ça rentre, lieutenant ? On les compte,
ceux qui ont su démasquer ces farceurs du *Times* et qui
sont encore là pour le raconter.

BAD GUYS ET FISHES CONDOS

« Ne pas filer de pouvoir à ceux qui ne le méritent pas
et qu'on ne respecte pas. » C'est sur ce principe que s'est
fondée la Bad Guys Inc. Joey avait ce vieux pote, Verne
Williams, palefrenier quelque part aux fins fonds de la
cambrousse et qui débarque un beau jour à NY en disant
à Joey : « Aide-moi ! Je veux être acteur, Joey ! Aide-
moi. » Le gus n'avait aucune expérience, pas de portfo-
lio, rien à envoyer aux agents, mais si quelqu'un a un jour
l'imprudence de refilmer un SAS, Verne Williams four-
nirait un Elko Krisantem plausible. Joey l'envoie voler
des avis de recherche à la poste, lui tire le portrait et lui
arrange un dossier en forme de mise à prix : « Wanted
- Verne Williams, etc. »

Quelques photocopies plus tard, le tract est envoyé aux
plus grandes agences de la ville. Bientôt le téléphone
sonne. L'un des ténors de la profession convoque Verne
et son manager. Les deux compères déboulent chez le type
et au lieu de le supplier ou de chercher à lui plaire, ils
« destroyent le burlingue », déchirent le script en mille
morceaux et molestent le négrier que, les cachetonneurs
aux abois qu'ils avaient martyrisés jusque-là n'avaient pas
habitué à ce genre de pratiques. Evidemment, Verne
décrocha le job. Et Joey eut l'idée de fonder une agence
spécialisée dans la fourniture des Bad Guys, des Bad Girls,
des Bad Kids ou même des Bad Dogs que le cinéma et
les planches ne cessent de réclamer. Condition requise
pour entrer sur les listes : avoir l'air mauvais, mais bien
se comporter.

DEMAIN LA FRANCE

Jusqu'à présent, Joey a réussi à échapper aux foules
qui veulent sa peau. Jusqu'à quand... ? Tout récemment,
il s'est mis en tête de venir poser des pièges en France.
Du coup, vous en foutez lieutenant. On le bute en France,
c'est plus vos oignons. Le GIGN est pas fait que pour
les chiens et les touristes irlandais. Le seul truc, c'est
qu'une fois en France, je me demande bien avec qui cet
âne de Joey va bien pouvoir se brouiller : les autonomis-
tes corses, le Front national, la marque de pantoufles qui
sponsorise Fabius, les Beurs, Yves Montand, l'ambassade
d'Iran, *Télérama*, Jacques Séguéla, les élèves du Centre
de formation des journalistes, la Haute Autorité de l'au-
diovisuel, *Le Nouvel Observateur* ? Va savoir. Pourtant,
quoi qu'il arrive, ce numéro pouvant servir de preuve,
ce sera pas faute de les avoir prévenus, lui (Joey) et ses
victimes à venir. Seulement voilà : allez savoir pourquoi,
les gens prennent pas au sérieux les trucs qu'ils lisent dans
le journal.

Laurent Chalumeau.

petra

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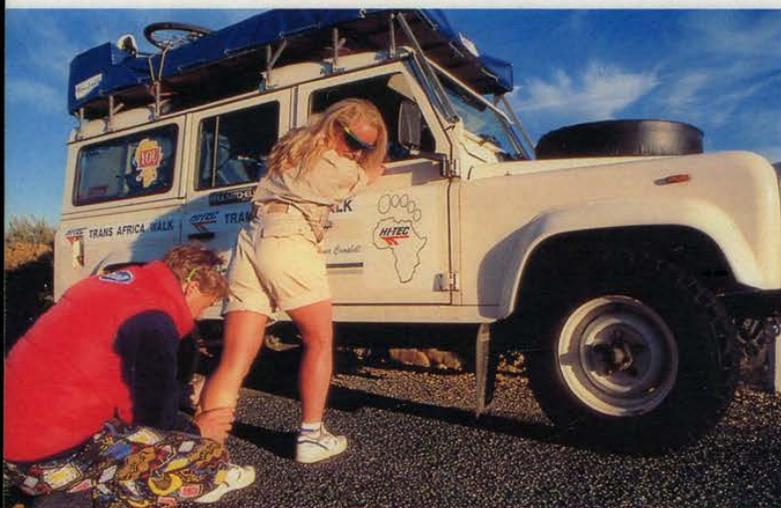
JOEY SKAGGS

„Meine Leinwand“, sagt Skaggs, „sind die Medien.“ Skaggs ist „Hoax“-Künstler (Hoax = Scherz). Mit gezielt gestreuten Falschmeldungen führt er die US-Medien immer wieder in die Irre. Damit will er die Unverantwortlichkeit der Presse anprangern. Skaggs größter Coup: eine angebliche Samenbank mit Sperma von Rockstars. Die Medien berichten eifrig.

GOURMET-ZIRKUS

BERNHARD PAUL UND HANSPETER WODARZ

Der eine war Zirkuschef, der andere Sterne-Koch. Zusammen sind Roncalli-Chef Bernhard Paul und Hanspeter Wodarz („Ente vom Lehel“) jetzt die Macher des Projekts „Panem et Circenses“, zur Zeit auf Tournee durch deutsche Großstädte. Fürstlich tafeln unter der Zirkuskuppel bei Akrobatik, Musik und Attraktionen. Wodarz, der sein Restaurant seinem Sous-Chef überließ: „Da essen nicht nur die Augen mit, da schlägt auch die Seele Purzelbäume.“



WELTEN-BUMMLERIN

FFYONA CAMPBELL

Sie ist 24, hat aber, sagen die Orthopäden, den strapazierten Körper einer achtzigjährigen Frau. Kein Wunder, denn Ffyona Campbell hat 15 000 Kilometer auf dem Buckel. Und zwar zu Fuß. Alles fing an mit einer Wanderung durch Großbritannien. Dann packte die Engländerin die ganz große Wanderlust: Sie durchquerte Australien und die USA. Zur Zeit liegen 12 000 Kilometer Afrika vor ihr. Wenn sie die geschafft hat, fehlen nur noch läppische 800 für den Eintrag „Zu Fuß um die Welt“ fürs Guinness-Buch der Rekorde. Und die Knochen? Ffyona fatalistisch: „Wenn ich mit dreißig im Rollstuhl sitze, dann soll es wohl so sein.“

FOTOS: TOBIAS EVERKE, HUSCH, PANDIS

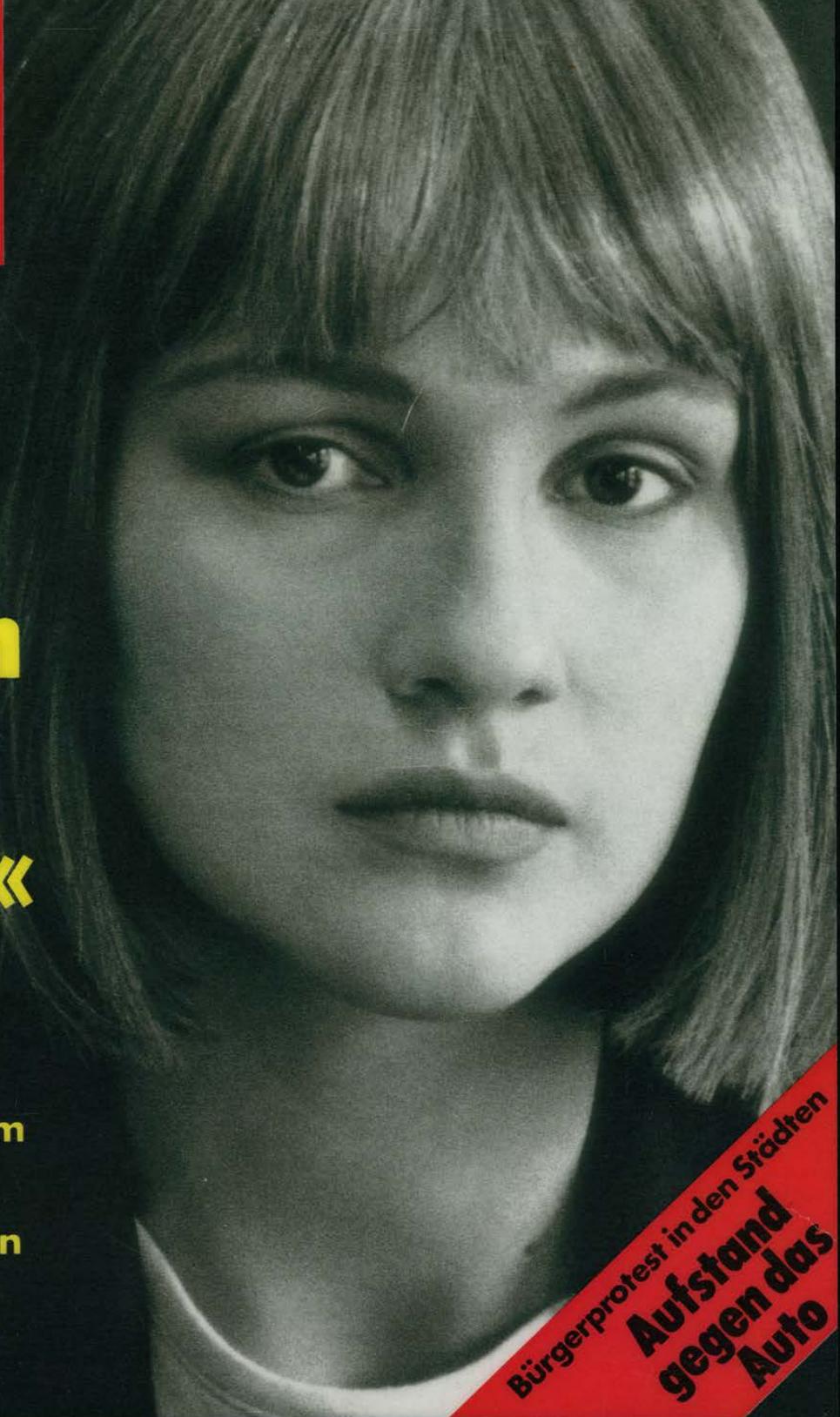
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stern

magazin



Tatort Schule

»Mein Lehrer hat mich miß- braucht«

Michaela war 12,
als sie zum ersten
Mal von einem
Oberstudienrat zum
Sex gezwungen
wurde. Alle wußten
es, und alle haben
geschwiegen

Bürgerprotest in den Städten
**Aufstand
gegen das
Auto**

Die echten Falschen

Die »Hoaxer« sind im Vormarsch, die Nachrichten-Erfinder- und Presse und Publikum fallen darauf rein

Die Zukunft liegt in den Kakerlaken«, doziert Dr. Joseph Gregor von der Universität Bogotà zur besten Sendezeit im amerikanischen Nachrichtenmagazin »Live at five« und hält demonstrativ eine Küchenschabe vor die Kamera. Aus den unliebsamen Mitbewohnern New Yorker Haushalte will er einen heilsamen Extrakt gemixt haben.

»Während die Menschheit sich und die Welt zerstört, halten die Schaben

seit 350 Millionen Jahren allen Seuchen und Katastrophen stand«, fährt der Doktor fort. Nur logisch, daß die Menschen von der Widerstandsfähigkeit der krabbelnden Viecher profitieren sollten. Sein Naturheilprodukt, »in einem einjährigen Selbstversuch erprobt«, heile Akne und Arthritis und schütze vor radioaktiver Verseuchung.

Dr. Joseph Chenango priest eine andere haarige Sache an: Als Präsident der

»Hair Today Ltd.« verwies er auf eine Reihe von Spendern in seiner Kartei, deren Skalps er im Todesfall für 3500 Dollar Kahlköpfigen transplantieren könne. Und ein Joseph Schlafer, Leiter des Reiseunternehmens »Comacocoon«, machte Furore, weil er gestreßten Bürgern »völlige Entspannung durch Urlaub in Narkose« versprach.

Drei Nachrichten, die dreierlei gemeinsam haben: Erstens sind sie erstunken

und erlogen, zweitens nahm sie ein Teil der Medien für bare Münze. Drittens steckt hinter den drei Experten mit dem Vornamen Joseph ein und derselbe: Joey Skaggs, 46. Der New Yorker ist einer der kreativsten Vertreter einer Kunstform, die sich »Hoax-Art« nennt, nach dem englischen Wort »Hoax« für Täuschung, Fopperei oder schlicht Zeitungsentee.

Mit skurrilen Pressemeldungen und simulierten



FOTO: GIORGIO PALMISANO

An den Falschmeldungen des New Yorkers Joey Skaggs, 46, haben sich schon viele leichtgläubige Reporter die Finger verbrannt. Skaggs erfand unter anderem die Samenbank mit Spermien von Rockstars und das Hundebordell. Alles wurde gedruckt



AUS ALLER WELT

Diät-Wächter essen Kunden den Pudding

New York
Es sind durchweg kräftige Burschen, die seit neuestem in New York auf anderer Leute schlanke Taille achten und dabei notfalls sanfte Geacht anwenden. Meist selbst weit

lassen sie mittags Dafür gibt's wir Knäckebröt.

Vor dem Flimm verdrücken die er des H...

Ein »Hoax« macht Karriere: Über die erfundene Diät-Leibgarde »Fat Squad« von Joey Skaggs (hinten links), die Übergewichtige von Bäckereien und Hamburger-Shops fernhält, wurde in aller Welt berichtet

THE WASHINGTON POST

Style

Policing the Pour

The Fat Squad: How to Lose Weight With Hire

By Robert Pfeiffer
Special to The Washington Post

Dump the doughnuts. Chuck the chocolate. The Fat Squad is coming. It's the newest strategic advance in the ongoing Battle of the Bulge, the brainchild of one Joseph Bones (his real name), a New York entrepreneur who decided three months ago to wage the war against fat on previously unexplored turf—your



Sensationen führen Hoax-Artisten Reporter an der Nase herum. Ziel der Aktionen ist, die Schwächen der Mediengesellschaft aufzudecken: Sensationsgier, Experten-Kult und Leichtgläubigkeit.

Neben Joey Skaggs feiert Alan Abel, 61, seit Jahren schadenfrohe Triumphe. Der Spaßvogel aus Westport, Connecticut, lockte eine Reihe von Reportern ins New Yorker Plaza Hotel zu

der fingierten Hochzeit des gestürzten afrikanischen Diktators Idi Amin mit einem 18jährigen Ostküsten-Girl zwecks Erlangung der amerikanischen Staatsbürgerschaft. Abel heuerte einen 230 Pfund schweren Schwarzen an und steckte ihn in eine mit Orden übersäte Uniform. Einige Freunde wurden als Leibgarde ausgestattet, die Hotelsuite wurde mit ugandischen Fähnchen dekoriert. Von der Ze-

remonie, durchgeführt von einem sturzbetrunkenen Priester, der natürlich keiner war, ließen sich auch Beamte des Außenministeriums und des FBI blenden: Obwohl ihnen die »Leibgarde« den Eintritt verwehrte, bestanden sie darauf, bei der Heirat zugegen zu sein, von der sie, peinlich genug, erst durch Journalisten erfuhren.

Seinen größten Coup landete Abel an einem nachrichtenarmen Wochenende im Januar 1990, als ganz New York der Ausspielung des 35-Millionen-Dollar-Jackpots entgegenfieberte. Dann teilte die Lotteriegesellschaft mit, es handele sich um eine Einzelperson. Mehr war nicht bekannt. Bis Leser bei den Zeitungen anriefen und berichteten, eine junge Frau werfe Dollarscheine aus einem Fenster des Omni Plaza Hotels. Kurz danach gab es eine Pressemitteilung auf Hotelbriefpapier: Die überglückliche Gewinnerin lasse in der 400-Dollar-Suite Nummer 450 die Champagnerkorken knallen. Charlene Taylor, jung, schön, unverheiratet, Kosmetikerin aus Dobbs Ferry im Staat New York und über Nacht Millionärin – ein Stoff für Schlagzeilen.

Den Reportern, die ihre Suite stürmten, erzählte Charlene, die Gewinnzahlen hätten ihr »Malcolm Forbes und Donald Trump im Traum zugeflüstert«. Als eine Journalistin der »Daily News« in einem Nebenzimmer der Suite Alan Abel entdeckte, den sie von einem seiner Kurse über »Praktisches Witzemachen« kannte, wußte sie Bescheid. Am nächsten Tag bejubelten die Zeitungen die »Millionärin«, nur die »Daily News« verriet: »Es ist ein Hoax« und die Lottogewinnerin die Schauspielerin Lee Chirillo.

Witzbold Abel, sonst Schriftsteller, finanziert den Spaß aus eigenen Mitteln,

manchmal legen auch seine Freunde zusammen (die »Hochzeit« beispielsweise kostete 8000 Dollar).

Auch Kollege Joey Skaggs, der im Hauptberuf Vorlesungen über Kommunikation hält, trifft mit seiner Fopp-Art zielsicher den Nerv der Zeit. Zum Diätwahn fiel ihm die »Fat Squad« ein: eine Leibgarde aus Muskelprotzen, die AbSpeckwillige gegen ein Tageshonorar von 100 Dollar mit physischer Gewalt daran hindern sollte, Konditoreien zu betreten oder andern Kühlschränken zu gehen. Tierfreunde ärgerte Skaggs mit dem »Hundebordell, pro Sprung 50 Dollar«, Moralapostel mit einer »Samenbank mit Spermien von Rockstars«, Law-and-order-Fans mit einer neuen Sorte Bürgerwehr: Die Gruppe »Walk right« stellte einen Katalog von 66 Regeln für geordneten Fußgängerverkehr auf. Darunter ein Verbot, nach Einbruch der Dunkelheit Sonnenbrillen zu tragen.

Die erfundenen Sensationen machen auch international Karriere. Das französische Fernsehen sendete einen Beitrag über die Diät-Wächter, eine deutsche und eine japanische Zeitung berichteten über die Kalorien-Rambos.

Daß Tierfreunde ein dankbares Hoax-Objekt sind (Skaggs' Hundebordell rief den Tierschutz auf den Plan), hat wiederum Alan Abel bereits 1963 mit seiner »Gesellschaft gegen die Unzüchtigkeit nackter Tiere« bewiesen. Aus moralischen Gründen forderten die Mitglieder die Bekleidung von Haustieren, die mehr als 15 Zentimeter messen. Von Fernsehkameras begleitet, jagten sie im Central Park Hundebesitzern hinterher und warfen deren kläffenden Lieblingen Jacken über. Für Pferde empfahlen sie Bermudashorts, für Katzen Strampelanzüge. Es folgten heiße Talkshow-Debatten

בירמה

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טלי ליפקין-שחק
מתפנה מהמרוץ כדי
לראיין את אחרון
האינטלקטואלים
הטלוויזיוניים

**האם יעקב אילון נוטש
את חברת החדשות?**
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הרייטינג החסוי של כל ערוצי הכבלים אסנת כותן, 51

פעם אחר פעם, הצליח ג'ואי סקאגז לתפוס את התקשורת עם הכנסיים לחטה. על סי.אן.אן, לחשל. הוא עבד כבר 5 פעמים

את הכלב שלחם מסופק. הגיעו גם כל מיני בקשות מוזרות, מאנשים שרצו לעשות סקס עם כלבים או להסתכל עליהם. "חייכתי לעיתונות. זה לא לקח זמן רב: התקשורת רצתה לראות את זה. אספתי 25 שחקנים ו-15 כלבים, וביימתי 'לילה בבית זונת לכלבים' עבור התקשורת. היתה, למשל, שחקנית לבושה שמלה אדומה וסרט אדום בשיער, שהופיעה עם כלבה בסוודר אדום וסרט אדום. הן התהלכו לפני הכלבים, מוחזקים על ידי שחקנים שהתחזו ללקוחות. "אני, בתור הכרוז, אמרתי: 'אלו הן שרה ולובה. לובה היא כלבת זאב חצי מעורבת בת שנתיים, מעדיפה דוברמניס וכמעט בתולה."

"היה וטרינר מתחזה במקום, ונתתי הרצאה עם תמונות על טכניקות זיווג. היה שאלון שלקוחות מודומים מילא: בן כמה הכלב? האם יש לו חיסונים? תעודות? מדוע הכלב צריך את זה?"

"התקשורת הייתה שם, והם היו היחידים שלא היו שחקנים. כולם האמינו לזה, והתקשורת התחילה לפרסם. "האגודה למען החיות, ראשות העיר ותמסטר התחילו במסע הכפשה בניסיון להפיל את העסק שלי. הפכתי לסדרור של ניו-יורק."

"איי.בי.סי התקשרו, ורצו לעשות סרט תעודה. לא הסכמתי להראות להם את בית הזונת, במונחה שאני דואג לביטחונן האישי. למעשה, לא רציתי לעבור עוד הפקה. כל מתיחה שאני עושה היא כמו לעשות סרט, תיאטרון או פרסומת. להעלות קונספט, לכתוב, להפיק,

– ומה קרה?
"כוחות גדולים של המשטרה הגיעו ועצרו חלק מאתנו".
– וזאת היתה רק ההתחלה.
"כמובן. ב-1969 פיסלתי בובת גרוטסקית של פסל החירות, כשהן אוחזות בחלקי גופות של תינוקות, חלקן ישובות בכיסאות-גלגלים, והצגתי את זה ב-4 ביולי – שוב, כאות מחאה על מלחמת וייטנאם."

אם הכלב חטפס לך על הרגל – התקשר אלינו

"ב-1976 פרסמתי מודעה כזאת: 'אם לכלב שלך יש יום הולדת, או שאחה נבוך למצוא את הכלב מתנפל על כרית – עכשיו, בפעם הראשונה, עבור 50 דולר, תוכל לספק את כלבך מינית. זה לא שירות שידוכים למטרת הרבעה – זהו שירות להנאה מינית טהורה. יש לנו מגוון נהדר של כלבות. מכיוון ובאופן טבעי הן מיוחמות רק כל חצי שנה, אנחנו משתמשים בסם מזרז ייחום בשם אסטרו-דיאל. אתה או הכלב שלך תוכלו לבחור בכל אחת מהכלבות, הוטרינר יוריק אותה, היא תהיה מוכנה לזיווג, ובינתיים אתה תוכל להתרווח עם כוס בירה בבאר הצמוד, או לצלם. אנחנו משתמשים באמצעי מניעה, כך שהכלב שלך לא צריך למחד מתביעות אבהות."

– מה היו התגובות?
"מדהימות. אנשים היו מוכנים לשלם 50 דולר כדי לראות

מו כל איש גרילה, גם ג'ואי סקאגז נלחם נגד אויב משמעותי וממוסד ממנו: התקשורת. סקאגז הוא מותחן התקשורת המפורסם ביותר החי כיום. הסאטיריות שלו, שמכונות בשפה מדעית 'הפרעה שידורית', זכו לכתבות שער בכל העולם. "בדיוק כפי שצירי משתמש בצבעי שמו", מספר סקאגז. "המעורבות שלי בתופעה המדיה היא האומנות שלי. למחייתי אני צויר, אבל צויר אף פעם לא היה מספיק בשבילי."



פסל החירות בכיסא גלגלים

כבר ב-1966 החל סקאגז לאבד כל שליטה. "בניתי צלב ענק, ופיסלתי את ישו מוגלגלת אמיתית ושיער אדם. שילבתי מתכת, עץ וגבס, ויצקתי איבר מין מברזל בין רגליו. שחבתי את זה בעיר בחג הפסחא במשך ארבע שנים רצופות. פעם אחת ניסיתי להכניס את זה לקתדרלה, כדי להביע את הצביעות של הנכסיה. אנשים התחילו לצעוק 'תהרגו אותו!'. המשטרה באה, הכתה אותי ורמסה את הפסל. מזל שהיה לי עוד אחד מוכן בבית לשנה הבאה."

"התקשורת כיסתה את זה, וכינתה אותי בכל מיני שמות גנאי. למדתי שיש לי הרבה כוח, ושאיני יכול לפתח את זה. "בתקופת מלחמת וייטנאם בניתי כפר וייטנאמי. לקח לי חודשים להקים אותו. בחג המולד של 1968 הלכתי לסנטראל פארק, ובעזרת חברים שלי, לבושים במדי צבא אמריקאים, התקפנו את הכפר. דאגתי להתייע על כך ברדיו כמה ימים מראש."

נורדניק



שני בדרמן

הוא הקים בית זונות פיקטיבי לכלבים. הוא שלח פלוגות קומנדו להשגיה על אנשים בדיאטה. הוא הסתער על כפר וייטנאמי בסנטראל-

פארק. והוא גם דאג שכל העיתונים יכתבו על זה. קבלו את ג'ואי סקאגז, מותחן התקשורת מספר אחד בעולם, וחי שהפך את הפברוק לאמנות. ברווז אמריקאי במיטה

לבייס, להציג, לשחק. יש לוקייטנים, אבירים. הסיפור הזה מאוד מסובך.

"כל פעם שמקור תקשורת רצה לראות, סיפקתי להם קלטות ודיאו של הכלבים מזדווגים. כל אחד יודע שברגע שכלב רואה כלבה הוא יעלה עליה, ככה שלא היה שם משהו מהפכני.

"איי.בי.סי עשו מה שנקרא 'סיקר מסביב' ראיון לפני ואחרי, בתוספת ראיונות עם אנשים אחרים. אבל המפתח לסרט התעודה שלהם היה הצילום שאני סיפקתי להם. הם ראינו אותי, אחר כך את צער בעלי חיים, וטרינר שהתנגד לסמי וירוז ייחוס וכן הלאה.

"למעשה, צער בעלי חיים שלחו חוקרים ממונים לתמוס אותי. הם תלו פוסטר 'מבוקש' במסדרון, עם פרס של 200 דולר לכל מי שיסגור אותי, בנוסף ללקוחות רגילים שהתקשרו, המשטרה וסוכנויות עיוניות אחרות התקשרו כביכול כדי לקבוע תאריך לכלב שלהם. הפרסום הלך ונבר, והסיפור הפך לעניין בינלאומי."

איך המתיחה נחשפת?

"סרט התעודה של ABC היה מומעד פרס 'אמ' לתשדיר החדשות הטוב ביותר של השנה, ואני זומנתי לחקירה על ניהול בלתי חוקי של 'בית בושת לכלבים'. שם חשפתי שזו

"בדצמבר '95, התקשרו סי.אן.אן וביקשו הדגמה. הרמנו מערך שלם של מחשבים ואנשי מחשבים, כשלמעשה כל מה שהיה שם זה רק גרפיקה ועיצוב. התוכנה, כמובן, הייתה מיכטיבית, כמו רוב מה שהיה שם. כולל המעבדה עצמה. "סי.אן.אן שידרה את התוכנית, וכחודש לאחר מכן הודתה התחנה שהיא נסוגה מהכתבה המקורית. זו הייתה הפעם החמישית שהם נפלו אצלי במח."

קומנדו דיאטה במטולה

האם נתפסת אי פעם?

"באופן מדהים, עדיין לא. אני תמיד מצפה לזה, בגלל שתמיד חשפתי את המתיחה בסוף. במשך השנים קיבלתי המון פרסום, כך שקיים חשש שמישהו יזהה אותי. מעבר לכך, אני תלוי בחברה שותפי-סוד שעוזרים לי. מפתיע אותי כל פעם מחדש שאני מצליח להתחמק. חוץ מזה, במתיחות תמיד יש רמזים, כדי לתת להם אפשרות לצאת מזה בכבוד."

רמזים?

"לדוגמה, עשיתי מתיחה ב-86, שנקראה 'מלונת השומן'. קראתי לעצמי לז'נר. במתיחה הזו פרסמתי מודעה שבעבור 300 דולר ליום, למינימום של שלושה ימים, אתה משכיר מלונת קומנדו שמכריחה אותך לבדוק בדיאטה. היא נמצאת איתך בבית, בעבודה, כשאתה יוצא, הולך לשירותים, או מחפש מחבוא אוכל.

"הרגשתי שיש המון אנשים שמנעלים אנשים אחרים ומרוויחים טונות כסף מעיסוק היתר במשקל עודף. היגיון, אומר, שאם אתה אוכל יותר מדי ולא מתעמל – תשמין. זהו

נ ו ד נ י ק

"צער בעלי חיים שלחו חוקרים החושים לתמוס אותי. הם תלו פוסטר 'מבוקש' עם פרס של 200 דולר לכל מי שיסגיר אותי. שוטרים התקשרו, כביכול כדי שלהם בבית הזונות"

הגיון פשוט, אבל הגיון חומק מרוב האנשים. יומשם שוב החתיול כתבות. ביקשו טלפן למטופלים שלי. ארגנתי שחקנים שהתחזו למטופלים וענו לראיונות בטלפון. אני משתמש באותו טלפון ובאותה כתובת כבר שנים, ומכעט לגמיר לא מתחפש. שלחתי תמונות של עצמי בתור ג'ו בנז – רציני לעשות את זה שקוף – אבל אף אחד לא יזהה. הצלחתי שוב להתל ברדי, בעיתונות ובטלוויזיה. "אפילו הזמינו אותי ל'בוקר טוב אמריקה' ולפאנל של כל מומחי הדיאטות השונים (קמברידג' וכו'). כשהופעתי ל'בוקר טוב אמריקה', צופים זהו זהו והתקשרו. למזלי, זה כבר היה מאוחר מדי."

"המזל הוא, שאמצעי התקשורת כל כך תחרותיים שמקור אחד תמיד ירצה להראות שהמקור השני נפל במח. למרות שאם הייתי רוצה, גם הם היו נופלים."

"הבעיה היא שאם אנשים עוקבים אחרי מקור אחד הם

עלולים לעולם לא לדעת שזו הייתה מתיחה, וזה מעיד על בעיה רחבה יותר. זה גורם לי לפחד ממה שאנשים עם כוונות רעות, והרבה יותר כסף, שכל, חסן, עושים. עשו וימשיכו לעשות. זו הופכת להיות מציאות מאוד מפחידה."

חוק כלב

תוכל להסביר על התהליך הקריאטיבי שלך?
 "לקונסטטים יש תמיד רמת סבירות מסוימת, והם חייבים להיות ראיניים לשידור. אני מכין משהו מפתח לתקשורת, אם הם יחדשו שזה מוזר. העניין העצוב הוא שתקשורת מחפשת את המורד, כי כולם רוצים רייטינג. עשיתי פעם מתיחה על אנשים שמקבלים הרמונים המיוצרים מנוקים כדי לרפא אקנה ולהסן מפני קרינה גרעינית ואף אחד לא הניד עקפה."

"בקיץ '94, הכנתי מתיחה שנקראה 'מרק מבשר כלב'. היצירה הונגרה כמעט לחלוטין על ידי התקשורת ועל ידי מתחסיים גזעניים, אוהבי כלבים, וטיפוסים הרמוניים שבלעו את הפיתיון.

"התפקיד שלי, חוק מלגות את הרעיון, שהתבסס על עובדה אמיתית שחלק מטרבויות אסיה אוכלות כלבים, היה ליצור מציאות מדומה. כל מה שעשיתי היה להיעזר במה חברים קוריאנים שתמכו בכוונתי – לחשוף גזענות וחסור סובלנות תרבותית בצביור ובתקשורת. כתבתי מכתב באנגלית לקולקת לניר מכתבים קוריאני: 'בתי המחסה לכלבים הרגיים מיליון כלבים ועולים כסף. במקום זה, פנו אלינו. אנחנו קונים כל כלב, לא משנה הודל או הצבע. מעדימים גדול, צעיר חזק, אתה עושה עוד כסף, הופך אנשים לשמחים, וגם הכלב לא סובל: יש לנו מוות מהיר לכלבים.' "התפקיד שלי כאן היה פסיבי. כל מה שעשיתי היה לכתוב מכתב ולפרסם מודעה עם טלפון בעיתון (במזכירה האלקטרונית היו קולות של כלבים ובישול). מעולם לא עניתי לטלפון, רק הקלטתי את ההודעות. קיבלתי אלפי קללות ואימים מהמוניטרים שהיו מודאגים מאכילת כלבים. האנשים האכפתיים האלו התקשרו לתקשורת שמדי הגיבה והחלה בכיסוי הסיפור באופן גזעני וסטריאוטיפי. למשל, כתב טלוויזיה אחד ארב, באופן שרירותי, לבעל מסעדה אסיאתית, דחה לו את המכתב ושאל אותו אם הוא יודע על זה משהו. "שיפדו אותו כאילו היה אוכל כלבים, וחתולים, הציגו אותו כלא אושי, אסיאתי, נכרי. להורפת המצב, תחנת הטלוויזיה פרסמה את שם המסעדה שלו. התקשורת יוצרת גיבורים, נבלים ויוצרת מעצמה בעיה עבור החברה כולה."

אלו מתיחות לא היית עושה?

"אני לא לוקח מאנשים כסף או עושה משהו שמסכן אותם באיוו שהיא צורה. אני גם מתייעץ בחוק לפני שאני עושה מתיחה, כדי לא להסתבך באופן רציני. על פניו, משהו יכול להישמע מצחיק, אבל כשאתה בתוך לעוסק זה לא, או שיש יותר מדי אחריות. מה שעושה מתיחה טובה זאת האמירה, הכוונה והטכניקה."

מאחר ואין לך שום רווח מהמתיחות, מה עוד אתה עושה? איך אתה מתקיים?

"כאמון, אני בר מזל שיש לי היכולה להתקיים מהדמיון ומהיצאות שלי. אני מרצה בנושאי ידעית התקשורת והפרמה שידורית בפני אוניברסיטאות וארגונים חברתי העולם. אני פסל וצייר, והעבודות שלו הוצגו בבלריות ומוזיאונים בינלאומיים."

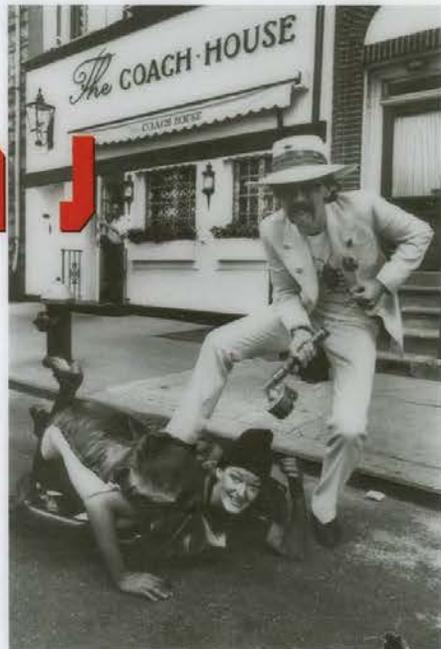
מה אתה חושב על המציאות במז'וז?

"זה יהיה יחיר מציד, בתור אמריקאי שלא נר ישראל ומקבל את המידע שלו מחברים או מהתקשורת, להגיב באופן אינטליגנטי. אבל קודרת המבט שלי היא שזה בלתי אפשרי להיות אובייקטיבי בנוגע לקונפליקט היסטורי במזרח התיכון. אני חושב שכל צד הוא האויב הגרוע ביותר של עצמו. אני מאמין שגם אם יוכל להיות שלום הפלשתינים יקבלו אוטונומיה ומדינה עצמאית, זה עדיין ייקח זריות של מאמץ מורוז להוכיח שהשלום יכול להיות ארוך טווח. יש כל כך הרבה פחד, כאב ושנאה, עם כאבים שרק מתעמקים עם הזמן."

אתה חושב שיש מקום לאמנות סוציו-פוליטית במדינה כל כך קטנה ורווית-צרות כמו ישראל? היא לנו הרי את 'קפה כאילו'.

"אני חושב שהמורד הוא חיוני להגברת עירנות ומודעות לגבי נושאים שמשפיעים על האופן בו אנחנו חושבים ומתנהגים – הערכים שיש לנו. מתיחה, תעלול, מופעים סאטיריים, איך שלא תקראי להם, אפילו אם יש להם צד אפל, עוורים להתיל אור על אמנות ודעות קדומות – טובות ורעות." 

מידע על ג'ואי סקאגו ותר מעללי ניתן למצוא ב: www.joeyskaggs.com.



היתה מתיחה. הם, כמובן, היו בהלם ולא האמינו. הייתי צריך להשאיר הצעירה בכתי. איי.בי.סי, דרך אוב, מעולם לא נסוגו מהכתבה.

המחשב מצא את או.ג'יי אשם

והיה גם מרייקט 'סולומון'.

"באוקטובר '95 התחזיתי לדר' ג'וזף בנוסו. שחררתי מעל 3,000 הדעות עיתונאיות למנהלות פרליות, רשויות מחוקקות, שופטים ודייקנים של בתי ספר למשפט, ובהן הרותי שאני, יחד עם 150 מדעני מחשבים ועורכי דין, פיתחנו בשבע השנים האחרונות פתרון למשבר הסחבת במערכת המשפטית האמריקאית. המתרון נקרא 'סולומון'. זו תוכנה שמוניחה לתוכה את כל הפרטים והקובעות של חיק משפטי, והיא מדיפה גור דין. כך מתגבל הצורך בחברי-המושבים.

"כל העדים, עורכי הדין והשופטים יתנו את החצרות שלהם למחשב, שיש לו את היכולת לזהות לחץ ושקר, ובכך לוודא שהם דוברי אמת. סיפרנו כי הזנו משפטים של השנים האחרונות ושפטנו אותם מחדש. הבטחנו לנסות בקרוב את משפטו של או.ג'יי סימפסון, שבמשפט שנערך זמן קצר לפני כן יצא זכאי.

"כאמור יותר פרסמנו שסימפסון יצא אשם. הבלאגן התחיל. במשך שלושה חודשים הנושא הופיע על גבי עיתונים, מגזינים וכתבי עת משפטיים.

EPOCA

In regalo
L'ATLANTE DEL MONDO
DI DOMANI: GLI OCEANI

**Si chiacchiera
sul viaggio di Craxi,
sulla mamma della Carrà,
sulle notti dei ministri:
una Repubblica fondata
sul pettegolezzo?
Arbore e D'Agostino
ne hanno ricavato un libro**

**PETTEGOLI
D'ITALIA**



*Stalin cancella Trotskij,
Mao cancella Lin Piao,
Hitler cancella Goebbels.
Ecco che cosa succede
quando la storia diventa
un'opinione: una mostra
a Parigi ci svela che
la verità non solo può
essere riscritta ma
anche rifotografata.
Mussolini diventa
più eroico, Lenin più
rivoluzionario,
Breznev più buono. Ma
tutto questo non
succede solo per il
passato. Joey Skaggs,
un artista americano,
ha dimostrato che,
attraverso i mass-media,
si può falsificare
anche la realtà
contemporanea.*

ALAIN JAUBERT

LE COMMISSARIAT AUX ARCHIVES

LES PHOTOS QUI FALSIFIENT L'HISTOIRE



NE DE LA VILLE DE PARIS • PARIS AUDIOVISUEL

*Il catalogo della mostra «Le commissariat aux Archives» appena
aperta al Museo d'arte moderna di Parigi. A sinistra: Joey Skaggs
alla Tv in uno dei suoi travestimenti.*



LE CARTE FALSE

di Giordano Bruno Guerri

LE CARTE FALSE

Giuseppe Scaggioli, alias Joseph Gregor, alias Joe Bones, alias... Sono le molte facce di un singolare «artista»; l'americano Joey Skaggs, burlone, provocatore di professione, cervello di clamorose truffe ai danni dei mass-media. Inventandosi avventure mai vissute, magiche pillole di scarafaggio e persino una casa d'appuntamento per cani, ha coperto stampa e tv Usa di ridicolo. «Con me», assicura, «la burla è diventata un'espressione culturale...».

VA IN ONDA UNA TRUFFA D'AUTORE

di Remo Urbini

L'ultimo caso è di tre mesi fa e ha per protagonista un tedesco, Heinz Braun, che ha venduto a una tv inglese il video-tape di una fantastica avventura mai vissuta: la sua fuga da Berlino Est travestito da autista russo, alla guida di un'auto con tre manichini a bordo, in uniforme da generali dell'Armata Rossa. Braun, ora irreperibile, ci ha guadagnato 28 mila marchi, meno di 20 milioni. Se lo prendono, rischia un anno di carcere e 50 mila marchi di multa. La truffa a mezzo stampa non paga? Non è detto: l'immaginario collettivo concede ampi spazi all'arte dell'inganno. Anzi, la nutre.

Cominciò Orson Welles nel '38, annunciando alla radio lo sbarco dei marziani. Gli credettero, qualcuno si suicidò. Così come credettero tutti, persino la giuria del premio Pulitzer, a Janet Cooke del *Washington Post* quando, due anni fa, raccontò la storia terribile di un'eroinomane di appena 8 anni. Tutto inventato. Il vento dell'ironia si abbatté sul giornale: ad autorizzare la pubblicazione dello scoop era

stato Bob Woodward, l'inflessibile reporter del caso Watergate. Il pubblico si domandò: e le famose «squadre di verifica» addette ai controlli incrociati, dov'erano quel giorno? C'erano, purtroppo. Spulciarono luoghi, dati, circostanze. Ma nessuno pensò di mettere in dubbio l'esistenza stessa della fonte, perché in America il giornalista è come il prete sul pulpito: può esagerare ciò che



PURTROPPO NON C'È PIÙ NIENTE DI «MALE»

di Gerardo Orsini

■ Uno stanzone in un caseificio semismantellato. Alle spalle la mole proteiforme del gasometro, quartiere Testaccio, Roma. Primi mesi del 1978. Una mezza dozzina di strani individui, alle ore più impensate, aggirando scatoloni vuoti e rottami di vecchie scrivanie rovesciano su un tavolaccio di compensato vignette e pezzi satirici di inaudita cattiveria. Siamo nella redazione de *Il male*. L'idea che i giornali non fossero altro che carte false, qui era di casa ben prima del fortunato pamphlet di Pansa. Sulle tracce delle migliori intuizioni situazioniste, affascinati, anche se non lo conoscevamo bene, dai testi di Jean Baudrillard, eravamo convinti di vivere in un mondo perfettamente falso. Bene, la nostra missione doveva essere quella di aprire gli occhi agli ignari italiani.

Per incominciare ci impegnammo a risolvere l'annoso problema della rivoluzione che in quei tempi lontani tanto appassionava le giovani intelligenze. «Lo Stato si è estinto», recitava infatti il titolo a piena pagina di una strana copia di *Repubblica*. «La cupa profezia di Carlo Marx si è avverata», spiegava il sommario. «Panico tra i parastatali», precisava un occhietto. Scafari, che commentava l'amara notizia nell'articolo di fondo, se la prese a male. Voleva denunciarci per aver abusato del suo nome. Ma poi ci ripensò. Il successo non fu travolgente. Comunque dalle 15-16 mila copie dei primi numeri passammo subito al doppio. Al di là dei testi accuratamente deliranti il merito della riuscita dell'operazione fu del nostro grafico l'indimentica-

bile Marcello Borsetti che risolse in modo eccezionale tutti i problemi di caratteri e impaginazione.

Il vero balzo arrivò pochi mesi dopo. L'Italia è stata esclusa per opera dei rudi olandesi dal campionato del mondo? Niente paura c'è qui *Il male*. «Annullati i mondiali», grida così un titolone del *Corriere dello sport*. «Gli olandesi erano drogati». «Usavano il dropedone», spiega il tossicologo. A Roma il falso giornale sportivo andò a ruba in poche ore. La barriera delle 60 mila copie era sfondata. Nel mezzo un simpatico sosia di Woytjla venne a farci visita e, «se sbaglio corrigitemi», esortò le autorità a lasciare libera la satira. A non comportarsi come in Polonia. Quella volta furono guai. A caso la polizia arrestò chi si trovava in redazione, nel frattempo diventata una lussuosa palazzina a Monte Verde.

Fine estate 1978. In occasione del Festival Nazionale dell'Unità di Genova l'autorevole organo del partito titola a sorpresa: «Basta con la Dc». Entusiasmo tra il popolo comunista. Non si contano le sezioni che affiggono in bacheca quella copia del loro giornale. Falsa? Certo, ma forse più corrispondente al vero stato d'animo della base del partito della linea ufficiale del compromesso storico.

Accompagnano la nostra resistibile ascesa sequestri, cause a non finire, ma anche il conforto dei colleghi dei giornali veri. Così quando il *Corriere della sera* annuncia «Da un'altra galassia vengono a noi», e con tanto di foto e fondino di Umberto Eco (per altro vero) racconta lo sbarco dei marziani, è il direttore Franco Di Bella a telefonare per complimentarsi. Del resto da tempo Pertini spediva il suo motociclista a recuperare gli originali delle vignette che lo riguardavano. Ci andammo anche a

pranzo portando in omaggio una pipa di radica, vera, lunga un metro. Ma un passaggio nell'annuale rapporto sulla libertà nel mondo di Carter, dove si accennava ai continui sequestri del settimanale di satira *Il male* come segno di una scarsa attenzione in Italia ai diritti civili (non stiamo scherzando, andate a sfogliarvi *La Repubblica* di quei giorni) raffreddò i rapporti con il Quirinale.

Sperimentata la formula non restava che esportarla, come avrebbe fatto ogni buon artigiano del made in Italy. Così nacque il *Tribuna Ludu* che proclamava Woytjla re di Polonia anticipando la grande esplosione di Solidarnosc. E poi, fra gli altri, la *Pravda*, diffusa dal nostro intrepido Sparagna nella Mosca delle Olimpiadi, con realistici annunci su dove comprare blue jeans, dischi dei Beatles e dove andare a vedere *Ultimo tango a Parigi*.

Ma il vero colpo grosso venne con la scoperta, che facemmo pubblicizzare adeguatamente dal *Giorno*, da *Paese Sera* dal *Giornale* del vero capo delle Brigate Rosse: era il povero Ugo Tognazzi. «E lo chiamava viziutto!», commentano gli occhielli. Il popolare attore incautamente, su suggerimento del suo sceneggiatore Sandro Parenzo, aveva invitato a cena un gruppo di redattori del *Male*, si vide così sbattuto in prima pagina. Doppia tiratura record: quasi 200 mila copie. Un trionfo. La gente aveva creduto l'incredibile. Di più non si poteva fare. Ineluttabile iniziò il declino. Ma i nostri generosi sforzi non sono serviti a molto. Basta pensare che alcuni anni dopo più di metà degli italiani hanno creduto veramente, solo per il fatto che era scritto sulle prime pagine dei giornali, e i Tg lo confermavano, che Enzo Tortora fosse uno dei capi della camorra. Se ci fosse stato ancora *Il male*... ■

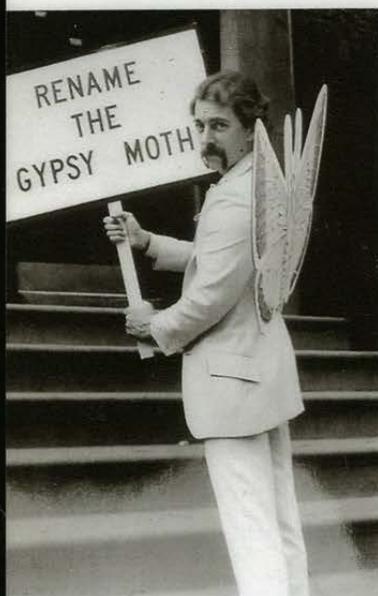
Joey Skaggs, 38 anni, ritratto nei panni che - fra mille travestimenti - considera i più veri: quelli del «media artist», e cioè di un artista che, usando stampa e televisione come cassa di risonanza per le sue burlle, produce dei veri e propri «happenings».

è, mai inventare ciò che non è.

Denaro, successo istantaneo, semplice megalomania. Sono chiavi umanissime a mettere in moto la pubblica menzogna. Il falso dei diari di Hitler fu per soldi; il venditore di cimeli che li vergò assicura che, per la stessa cifra (300 milioni di lire) «avrei prodotto persino un vangelo apocrifto». Il filmato della centrale di Chernobyl, acquistato dalla Abc - pare -

per mezzo milione di dollari, fu prodotto da un intraprendente jugoslavo che filmò con un filtro rosso l'ospedale di Cattinara e l'hinterland industriale di Trieste. Fogar nell'Artide caricò il mitico cane Armaduk sull'aereo e poi cercò di far credere al mondo che lo stesso Armaduk lo aveva trainato sino al Polo. Vanità da esploratore. Ma il cane era d'accordo? C'è poi il falso a scopo politico

LE CARTE FALSE



di cui il Kgb è maestro, tanto che la disinformazione internazionale - vedi le clamorose sceneggiate sui dissidenti, dai filmati di Sakharov alle lettere di Sharanski - portano un nome slavo: *disinformatzia*. Gli israeliani, che i trucchi li imparano in fretta, si sono inventati un agente rinnegato (vedi *Epoca* 1884) per avvertire i siriani che l'atomica di Davide esiste, ed è pronta a esplodere.

Bugie di cattivo gusto, crudeli o persino inquietanti. Per fortuna esiste anche la burla. Lo scherzo per lo scherzo. Gli

studenti di Livorno che gettarono le false teste di Modigliani nel fosso Reale non immaginavano di creare sconquassi e di diventare protagonisti di una pubblicità del Black & Decker. I prodi guastatori del *Male*, il settimanale satirico oggi defunto, lo facevano per mestiere ma, soprattutto, per divertimento. Come Francesco Moisis, il giornalista di Marghera che si è inventato un poeta mai esistito, gli ha fatto scrivere un libro di versi, lo ha fatto morire subito dopo in un tragico incidente, e ha raccolto una marea di favorevoli e lacrimose recensioni (lo stesso trucco era riuscito a fine Ottocento a Domenico Agnoli, che aveva ingannato persino D'Annunzio).

Dalla burla d'arte all'arte della burla. In America la menzogna a mezzo stampa è diventata un fatto culturale, ha un nome autorevole - *Media Art* - e un protagonista assoluto: Joey Skaggs, conosciuto negli ambienti del giornalismo Usa come il pericolo pubblico numero uno. Da cinque anni, Skaggs propina reportage-bidone ai mass-media firmandoli con un ghigno. Nella sua definizione «non si tratta di truffe, ma di happening artistici: una riflessione seria, anche se scherzosa, su un mondo dove le notizie corrono svelte ma non sanno dove andare». Un dadaismo dell'era elettronica, insomma, per mettere a nudo il funzionamento spesso troppo fragile dell'informazione scritta e parlata, che raramente verifica le proprie informazioni (almeno così sostiene Skaggs). La stangata e l'abbandono finale alla pubblica derisione sarebbero dunque una lezione salutare. Nascono così i suoi falsi clamorosi: la casa d'appuntamenti per cani, l'attraversata del Pacifico in windsurf, i commandos anti-ciccia, la banca dello sperma dei divi rock. Storie memorabili, come vedremo. Storie da premio.

Come agisce Skaggs? Quando gli viene un'idea particolarmente ingegnosa e allettante si



Qui a fianco: la scienza secondo Skaggs. Durante la trasmissione in tv in cui montò lo scherzo delle pillole di coleottero contro le radiazioni, sostenne senza essere contraddetto di aver studiato l'anatomia dello scarafaggio su questo modello a grandezza d'uomo (in realtà è sempre lui, travestito da scarafaggio). A sinistra, in basso: durante la campagna a favore degli zingari. In alto: mentre si prepara alla finta traversata dell'oceano Pacifico in windsurf.



Un altro travestimento-burla di Skaggs: questa volta è Joseph Bones, capo dei commandos anti-ciccìa.

organizza, inventa una precisa ragione sociale dietro cui celarsi, si fabbrica un personaggio, studia la regia dell'imbroglio, affitta i locali dove ambientarlo, assume personale pescando nella cerchia degli amici più fidati, si crea un look adatto. Poi spedisce alle agenzie e alle redazioni una serie di comunicati stampa e attende che la trappola scatti. Quasi invariabilmente, capita che un giornalista a corto di idee o in cerca di stravaganze abocchi: verrà accolto con tutti gli onori, diventerà il protagonista involontario di una perfetta messa in scena. Una volta scattato il primo articolo, il resto viene da sé: «Lo scherzo finisce», è la regola di Skaggs, «solo quando i giornalisti non hanno più modo di tornare indietro. La verità si paga a caro prezzo».

Lo ha imparato perfino la Cbs, la più potente fra le reti

OBESI DI TUTTO IL MONDO, PUNITEVI!

■ «Se riesco a catturare subito anche un solo pesciolino, è fatta: i pesci grossi seguono»: così Joey Skaggs spiega il suo segreto. L'escia? Un comunicato stampa. Cominciò proprio con un innocuo foglio dattiloscritto la più riuscita delle sue burlle: quella delle squadre anti-ciccìa. C'era scritto: «Obesi di tutto il mondo, punitevi! Per 300 dollari al giorno, le brigate anti-ciccìa vi sorveglieranno 24 ore su 24 e vi obbligheranno a rispettare la dieta. Per informazioni rivolgersi a Joe Bones». Seguiva indirizzo.

Il primo ad abboccare fu, per colmo di fortuna, l'autorevole *Washington Post*. Sei veloci cartelle dattiloscritte portarono alla ribalta Joe Bones e i suoi commandos anti-



ciccìa. Un rapido colpo di telefono era bastato al giornalista Robert Pfeiffer per mettere insieme il suo reportage per la rubrica «Stile».

«I nostri clienti», gli aveva spiegato Joe Bones con il tono autorevole di chi conosce il suo mestiere, «soffrono di "bulimia"». Si rivolgono a noi perché li aiutiamo a seguire la dieta che è stata loro imposta. Da quel momento, una specie di guardia del corpo li segue dovunque, giorno e notte. L'agente delle Fat Squads (squadre-ciccìa) scelto per questa missione deve es-

ser molto vigilante. I ciccioni sono furbi. Certi cercano di nascondere tavolette di cioccolata in bagno. Se un cliente viene sorpreso mentre mangia qualcosa di vietato dalla sua dieta, i commandos devono strapparglielo di mano anche con la forza».

Tre giorni dopo, anche il *Philadelphia Enquirer* pubblica la notizia. Seguono il *Miami Herald*, il *Daily News* e l'*Atlanta Constitution*. Poi arriva anche la televisione. Il 13 maggio 1986, Joe Bones, alias Skaggs, corona la sua carriera di burlone come ospite d'onore della trasmissione «Good Morning America», il più seguito telegiornale del mattino.

David Hartman, il conduttore, lo interroga per dieci minuti, mentre le telecamere zummano sulle facce patibolari dei commandos che Bones, berretto blu decorato con i colori delle Fat Squads, s'è portato appresso. Con lui, in scena, c'è anche una delle clienti: Stephanie Martin che spiega al pubblico: «La cosa funziona, ho già perso 30 chili. Mio marito mi ha abbandonato alle Fat Squads come regalo di compleanno».

David Hartman segue il discorso con gli occhi sbarrati, guarda la cliente che sorride, si concentra sui muscoli degli agenti poi arrischia un'ultima domanda: «E se il cliente decide di smettere la dieta?»

«Impossibile. Firmiamo un contratto con lui. A nessuna delle due parti è permesso di rescinderlo».

Hartman, prima scettico, ora appare addirittura catatonico: che sia uno scherzo? Il sospetto si dissolve quando, la stessa sera, la notizia rimbalza su tutti i maggiori telegiornali, assumendo addirittura rilievo internazionale: è Alain Chailou, della redazione newyorchese di Francia Uno a cascarci. Filma le Fat Squads e spedisce il servizio a Jean-Claude Bourret, animatore di «Buongiorno Francia». Il mattino seguente Bourret viene interrotto da una telefonata durante la trasmissione: «Sono Chailou, ferma tutto! Le Fat Squads sono un bidone». Troppo tardi: le immagini sono già passate. E non verranno mai smentite. ■

televisive Usa. Luglio 1976: un certo Giuseppe Scaggioli informa la stampa che ha aperto una banca dello sperma delle rock star. Da Dylan a Jagger, molti divi hanno risposto al suo appello: sono pronti a proliferare grazie alla fecondazione artificiale. I settimanali e i quotidiani - *Ms Magazine* - in testa, si gettano sulla notizia. Scaggioli promette una distribuzione gratuita di spermatozoi per festeggiare il bicentenario dell'

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Indipendenza americana. Davanti alla sede della banca dello sperma, nel Greenwich Village, si scatena l'isteria dei fans. E non soltanto dei fans: associazioni di lesbiche, gruppi di conservatori fedeli alla procreazione naturale, di aficionados d'ogni genere sono presenti (naturalmente tutti complici). Non mancano decine di giornalisti, tra i quali una squadra di Cbs News. Arriva il professor Scaggioli, volto disfatto dietro gli occhiali scuri. È accompagnato dal suo avvocato. Sventola davanti alle telecamere un pezzo di carta scritto con caratteri ritagliati dai giornali. «Devo leggervi un messaggio», spiega con voce rotta dai singhiozzi. Tutti tacciono allibiti. «Salve ragazzi», dice la lettera anonima, «vi ho beccato con le mutande alle caviglie. Ogni provetta di sperma vale un milione di dollari su un conto in Svizzera. E tanti dovrete pagarne per rivedere vivi i vostri futuri bambini». Mormorio di sgomento tra la folla. I giornalisti cercano di saperne di più, ma l'avvocato interviene: «Signori, la banca è stata derubata stanotte, è tutto quello che possiamo dire per ora». La sera, Cbs Television trasmette il reportage facendolo seguire da un editoriale dedicato al vuoto giuridico in materia. «Si può parlare di rapimento di minore a questo stadio del concepimento? Esiste una giurisprudenza su questo problema?». Tutte domande che il commentatore rivolge alla coscienza collettiva, mentre i quotidiani già stanno stampando l'edizione in cui Scaggioli rivela finalmente la sua identità e la portata della burla. La Cbs lascia cadere l'argomento senza più commenti.

Faccia lunga e affilata, capelli lunghi da residuo dell'era beatnik, Skaggs afferma di conservare «lo stesso spirito, lo stesso amore per la provocazione» che aveva nel '66. A 18 anni, si presentò alla cattedrale di St. Patrick, il giorno di Pasqua, avvolto in una tunica nera, croce in spalla, per protestare «a favore di Gesù e del suo pensiero, tradito dal



La documentazione fotografica di una delle beffe meglio riuscite di Skaggs. Qui sopra: due delle «comparse» ingaggiate dall'artista per rendere credibile la notizia della Casa d'appuntamento per cani. In alto: Skaggs mentre svela finalmente l'inganno, mostrando una maglietta con Snoopy e una scritta: «Pesce d'aprile».

IL PREMIO PER UNA VITA DA CANI

■ «Per 50 dollari fate la felicità del vostro migliore amico. La Casa d'appuntamento per cani vi propone una succulenta selezione di cagne in calore: da Fifi, la barboncina di Parigi, a Lady the Tramp, la bella vagabonda. Assistenza veterinaria garantita. Foto autorizzate. Maniaci astenersi. Solo per cani». Questo annuncio apparve nel gennaio 1976 sul «Village Voice» di New York.

Cominciarono subito a piovere telefonate. «Pronto, il mio Medoro mi rompe l'anima da tre mesi, continua a girare in tondo e cerca di masturbarsi nella cuccia. Pensate che debba portarvelo?...»

«Pronto «Casa d'appuntamen-

sante fu di certo questa: «Pronto «Casa d'appuntamento per cani»? Qui è la televisione Abc. Il vostro bordello canino ci interessa. Vorremmo girare un pezzo...»

Tombola! All'altro lato del filo Joey Skaggs per una volta non riusciva a trattenere le risa. Coprì il microfono con una mano e respirò profondamente per calmarsi. Poi fissò un appuntamento. Il giorno dell'intervista, in prima fila c'erano le «pensionanti» tenute al guinzaglio da quattro amiche di Joey. Lui spiegava, senza batter ciglio: le nostre cagne prendono la pillola e sono sottoposte a una cura ormonale che le tiene in calore tutto l'anno. Naturalmente i proprietari dei clienti possono assistere all'accoppiamento ma è vietata la partecipazione. La Abc Tv passa il servizio il venerdì sera in una trasmissione dedicata alle sevizie subite dai cani.

Le reazioni? Insorgono eminenti veterinari come il dottor Alan Meyer, presidente di una serissima associazione di categoria, intervistato dalla Abc che ha deciso di fare un'inchiesta approfondita sull'argomento, la Società protettrice degli animali vuol trascinare in giudizio Joey Skaggs che è convocato dal procuratore generale Louis J. Lefkowitz della Procura di New York. Neanche a farlo apposta, la convocazione è per il 1° aprile: quotidiani, radio, televisioni, fotografie, agenzie, tutto il mondo della stampa è presente. Joey arriva tranquillo, saluta passando la troupe di Abc, aspetta che tutti abbiano sistemato le macchine fotografiche e messo a fuoco gli obiettivi. Poi sbottona lentamente il suo giubbotto e lascia apparire una T-shirt rossa con l'effigie di Snoopy sopra la scritta «April fool», pesce d'aprile. È un'esplosione di ilarità. Ridono proprio tutti, meno il gruppo dell'Abc News che, per il servizio sulla fantomatica Casa d'appuntamento per cani era candidata a un Emmy Award, l'Oscar televisivo: un reportage perfetto, intitolato «Vita da cani». Tanto perfetto da somigliare al più clamoroso degli autogol. ■

ti per cani»? Possiedo una bella femmina Sanbernardo ma ho un problema: mangiano da matti 'ste bestiole... e non sempre ce la faccio a arrivare a fine mese. Be' insomma, capisce: hem, forse potrebbe lavorare per voi...»

Joey Skaggs ha ricevuto almeno 400 chiamate di questo genere. C'era chi voleva fare un regalo al cane per il suo compleanno, chi insisteva per togliersi voglie zoofile fino allora insoddisfatte, chi protestava in nome del diritto individuale degli animali, chi si scandalizzava a nome di una organizzazione religiosa. Ma la telefonata più interes-

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bigottismo dei cattolici». Stesso spirito, dunque, ma obiettivi diversi: «Anni fa avevo dentro una gran rabbia verso le istituzioni che oggi non ho più», dice. «Anche perché la gente, negli anni Ottanta, ha imparato a badare soprattutto ai fatti propri. Per questo i miei imbrogli non hanno più lo scopo di contestare la società in cui viviamo, o di rivelarne le magagne. La mia è diventata arte sublime, punto e basta».

Luglio 1983: Skaggs annuncia che tenterà di attraversare il Pacifico in windsurf, da Honolulu a San Francisco no-stop. Le tv gli balzano addosso, diventa istantaneamente un eroe. «È stata dura, quella volta», ricorda Skaggs. «Dovetti reggermi in piedi sulla tavola per una buona mezz'ora prima di sparire all'orizzonte e venir raccolto da una barca. Un mese dopo, stesso trucco sulla costa californiana. Un successone per uno che, della vela, ha davvero poca idea».

Perché darsi tanta pena? La risposta è provocatoria: «I media ci manipolano. La scelta e il trattamento dell'informazione è arbitraria. I giornalisti danno spazio soltanto a quello che interessa a loro. Io la manipolo a mia volta, regalandogli quello che cercano. Come quella volta degli scarafaggi...».

Maggio 1981. Il dottor Joseph Gregor, entomologo dell'università di Bogotà annuncia una grande scoperta: una pillola prodotta con gli ormoni degli scarafaggi può rendere l'uomo immune dalle radiazioni e, insieme, curare una grande varietà di malattie, dall'acne alle coliche mestruali. L'agenzia Up ci casca: dà la notizia della conferenza stampa e il gioco è fatto.

Panama calcato in testa, un paio di occhiali a specchio, il dottor Gregor sfoggia un paio di baffi da guerrigliero messicano. Sulla T-shirt bianca ha stampato un enorme scarafaggio. Per evitare errori di traduzione parla agli spettatori con un inglese approssimativo.

Incomincia la conferenza spiegando che anni di studi effettuati sugli scarafaggi gli hanno permesso di dimostrare la resistenza veramente eccezionale di questi insetti, soprattutto in presenza di radioattività. Per convincersene i giornalisti possono interrogare le settanta persone presenti (sono complici). Tutti hanno usato con successo la sua pillola. Il giorno dopo, il *Chicago Tribune*, il *Washington Star*, il *Philadelphia Inquirer*, il *Pittsburg Press*, il *Daily Times Herald* e buona parte dei 175 quotidiani locali clienti dell'agenzia United Press International parlano solo di scarafaggi. Le telescriventi impazziscono. Nbc News invita Gregor alla trasmissione «Live at Five». Gli ormoni degli scarafaggi sono

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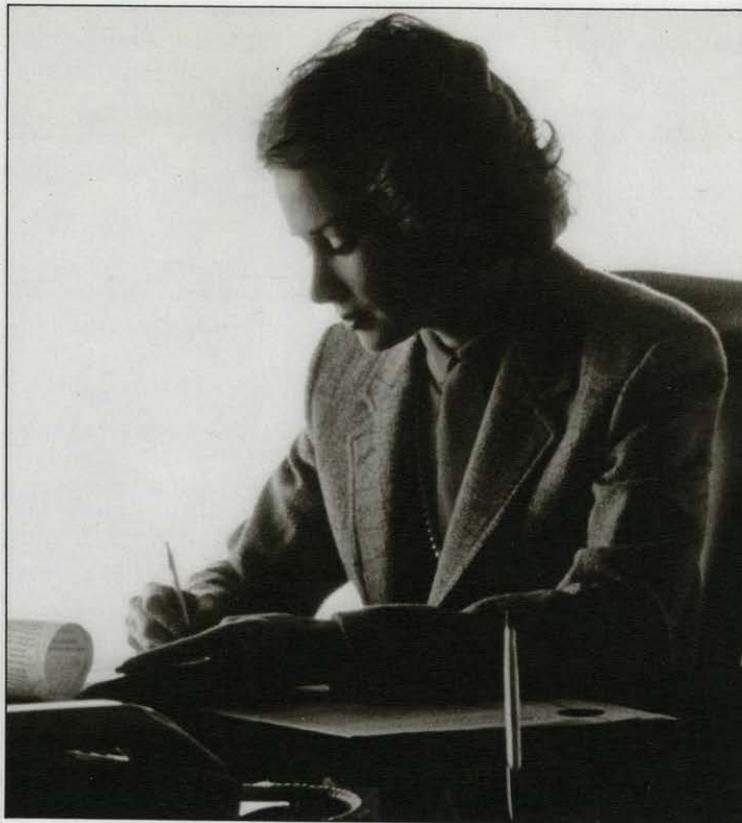
LE CARTE FALSE

il secondo servizio, subito dopo quello d'apertura. Jack Careful presenta l'ospite d'onore come un uomo che si è dedicato alla più nobile delle missioni e il dottor Joseph Gregor conferma: «Grazie agli scarafaggi sarà possibile salvare l'umanità». Lo studioso spiega di aver fatto ogni genere di verifica. I risultati sono stupefacenti. Ha portato in studio anche un campione del suo lavoro: due super-scarafaggi chiusi in una scatoletta di plastica trasparente. Garantisce che si sono sviluppati così nel suo laboratorio. Il presentatore sorride nervosamente. Con un po' di disgusto, sottolinea che le bestiole sono vive. Il dottor Gregor continua le spiegazioni manipolando la scatoletta davanti alle telecamere. «La razza umana è stupida e distruttrice. Spreca il suolo terrestre, l'acqua, il petrolio. Lo scarafaggio vive da 350 milioni di anni e sopporta 300 volte più radiazioni dell'homo sapiens. A Three Mile Island, all'epoca dell'incidente nella centrale nucleare, gli abitanti non avrebbero avuto bisogno di essere evacuati se avessero preso le mie pillole...». La trasmissione si conclude con un trionfale indice d'ascolto. Solo il giorno dopo, il dottor Gregor rivela la propria identità, attraverso le agenzie di stampa, e qualcuno finalmente, nei giornali e alle tv, si accorge che il nome del burlone, Joseph, è lo stesso del protagonista della *Metamorfosi* di Kafka, l'uomo che si sveglia alla mattina e si scopre tramutato in un gigantesco coleottero. Una beffa nella beffa. Ma è troppo tardi per porvi riparo.

«Non tutti i giornalisti hanno la stoffa di Sherlock Holmes», spiega Skaggs con una risata. «Anzi. Trattano i lettori come cretini, mentre forse dovrebbero guardarsi allo specchio». Tutti così i giornalisti? tutti degni di burle che hanno lo spiacevole sapore del qualunquismo? «No, ci sono anche giornalisti super che non vorrei mai prendere in giro, anche se qualche volta si abbandonano anche loro a pratiche spiacevoli. Prendiamo la rettifica: pubblici una notizia falsa su qualcuno, danneggi una persona, magari la distruggi in prima pagina, poi fai apparire una rettifica in un minuscolo trafiletto perso nelle pagine interne. Il male è fatto, e se protesti ti fai la fama di rompiscatole».

Il fatto è che Skaggs, per autodefinizione un artista della burla, non è un filosofo. Il suo «Populismo-dadai-sta», talvolta, produce effetti spiacevoli, come quella volta, nel giugno 1982, quando decise di montare uno scherzo sugli zingari. Sotto il nome di Jojo il gitano, fondatore del Gruppo di propaganda itinerante, lanciò una sfida alla città di New York: per una settimana,

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annunciò, gli zingari avrebbero scioperato. Sospensione totale dell'attività: niente più lettura della mano, addio veggenti e sfere di cristallo. Tutti compatti a sfilare per le strade in segno di protesta contro la segregazione razziale determinata - affermò Jojo - dal diffondersi della «gypsy moth» (letteralmente *tarma gitana*, che significa falena). Inutile dire che lo scherzo produsse nuovi rigurgiti razzisti tanto che, per difendere la causa della minoranza oppressa, scesero in campo il *New York Times* e il *Wall Street Journal*, coprendosi naturalmente di ridicolo quando Jojo rivelò la sua vera identità. Perché danneggiare un'intera comunità? Perché intrappolare due giornali che hanno una lunga e più che decente tradizione a difesa del cittadino? «Forse ho sbagliato», ammette Skaggs. «Cercherò di non ripetermi». Ma i suoi critici - e sono molti - sottolineano che in questo caso anche lui, come i media che ha nel mirino, preferisce sorvolare sulla rettifica.

L'accusato risponde attaccando: «Comunque sia, le mie bufale sono sempre istruttive». Ma non sempre - dimentica di dire - riescono. Soprattutto quando il tema della burla è talmente serio da destare sospetti nelle vittime predestinate. Talvolta, Skaggs chiede troppo alla propria fantasia. Nel 1981, la sera di Halloween, che è un po' il Carnevale americano (un Carnevale in chiave orrificica, però, con travestimenti prevalentemente stregoneschi), Skaggs invita tutti i notabili di New York a un banchetto contro la fame nel mondo. Ha preparato un'accoglienza a base di scheletri, in una sala tappezzata di immagini di bimbi dalla pancia gonfia. Dei mille invitati, però, nessuno lo prende sul serio. L'iniziativa è un fallimento, anche se i giornali perdono l'occasione d'oro per sottolinearlo.

Mitomane o artista, intellettuale o qualunquista, Skaggs ha comunque e sempre un alleato: il silenzio. Quando sbaglia, tutti lo ignorano, un buon-tempone da non prendere sul serio. Quando ci azzecca, il silenzio stampa cala per altre ragioni, e ingigantisce l'imbarazzo e lo schermo. «Il silenzio è la peggior malattia dell'informazione», sentenza. «È la non-informazione, il segreto sui destini e i problemi della società». E allora, signor Skaggs, quali sono i suoi prossimi programmi? Quali scherzi sta preparando? Sul tema piove un no-comment. Logico: che senso ha informare le vittime ignare, nelle redazioni di mezzo mondo? Contro i possessori di segreti c'è una sola arma, per quanto contraddittoria: il segreto.

Remo Urbini

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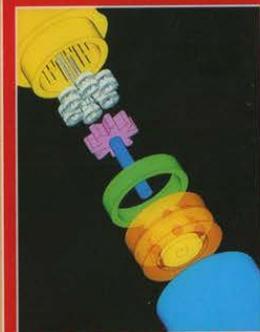
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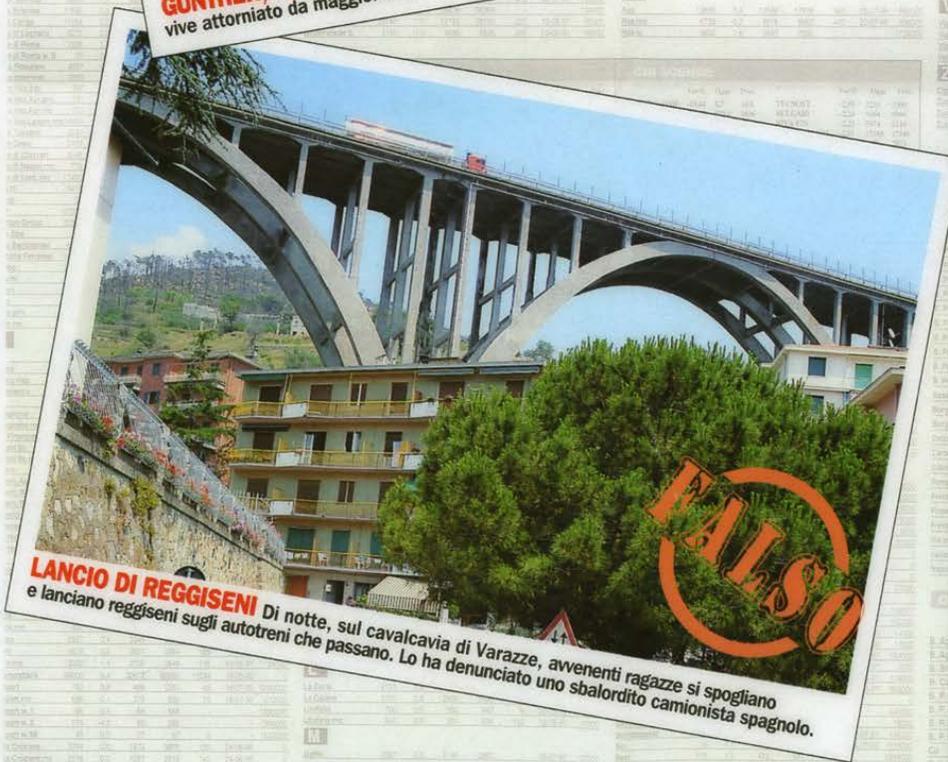


Queste notizie sono apparse sui giornali. Eppure erano inventate. Ecco come è successo

È toccato a David Hartman, conduttore del più seguito telegiornale Usa del mattino, *Good Morning America*, rivelare alla nazione la grande novità, ovvero la nascita delle *Squadre anti-ciccia*. Nello studio, seduto accanto al giornalista, il dottor Joe Bones illustrava i dettagli dell'iniziativa. Per 300 dollari al giorno ogni obeso avrebbe avuto a disposizione un "angelo custode" che, notte e giorno, sorvegliasse la sua dieta. «I ciccioni sono furbi», spiegava Bones. «Serve qualcuno che li tenga d'occhio e impedisca loro di sgranocchiare cioccolato chiusi dentro il bagno». La storia, ripresa da altri autorevoli quotidiani come il *Washington Post*, ha dell'incredibile. E infatti è falsa. Joe Bones (che, guarda caso, in inglese significa "ossa") altri non era che Joey Skaggs, in uno dei suoi più riusciti travestimenti. Newyorkese, 50 anni, Skaggs si definisce "media hoax artist", artista nel rifilare bufale, cioè notizie false, ai giornali. Lo fa, dice, per sottolineare la fragilità del sistema informativo: «I mezzi di informazione riportano solo quello che vogliono, e per giunta spesso sono pieni di falsità», afferma. Per punirli, Skaggs li mette alla berlina: è riuscito a far pubblicare notizie assurde come l'apertura di un bordello per cani. L'at-



GUNTHER, IL CANE MILIARDARIO Unico erede di una ricchissima signora tedesca, vive attorniato da maggiordomi in una villa toscana e presiede un'associazione animalista.



LANCIO DI REGGISENI Di notte, sul cavalcavia di Varazze, avvenenti ragazze si spogliano e lanciano reggiseni sugli autotreni che passano. Lo ha denunciato uno sbalordito camionista spagnolo.

Incredibile



VACANZE DA SOGNO Nella clinica del sonno del dottor Schlafen i clienti possono scegliere che cosa sognare: eros, vincite al lotto o altro.



FIDO ALLA BRACE Una ditta coreana vuole acquistare cani dai canili per farne salsicce. La loro carne, assicurano, è buona.

Rifilare una "bufala" in 5 mosse

Costruire una bufala, cioè una notizia falsa, per ingannare i giornali non è facile: richiede fantasia e organizzazione. Ecco i consigli dell'americano Joey Skaggs, che di bufale ne ha rifilate tante.

- Inventare una notizia curiosa, che attiri l'attenzione dei media, ma senza esagerare: deve sembrare comunque credibile.
- Se la storia lo richiede, trovare una struttura dove ambientarla.
- Trovare amici che stiano al gioco, interpretando le parti richieste dal copione.
- Mandare comunicati stampa a giornali, radio, televisioni raccontando per sommi capi la storia (meglio usare carta intestata). A questo punto si può già sperare che qualcuno abocchi e la pubblichi.
- Organizzare una conferenza stampa con i giornalisti. I dettagli devono essere perfetti, altrimenti alla prima domanda potrebbe crollare tutto.



Sbagliano per ambizione
La psicologa Tilde Gianni Gallino: "La rivalità tra giornali produce errori".



Più verità che menzogne
Mario Morcellini: "Chi è intervistato prova soggezione e dice la verità".

ma falso



Da noi le beffe più famose sono firmate dal gruppo Luther Blisset

► traversata del Pacifico in windsurf, la nascita di un computer-giuria che nei tribunali degli Stati Uniti starebbe per sostituirsi ai giurati emettendo verdetto al loro posto. Per ogni storia Skaggs noleggia attori, affitta strutture, invita i giornalisti e inscena uno spettacolo ai loro danni. Follie? Non del tutto. Skaggs non è d'altronde l'unico professionista delle bufale. Anche in Italia sono in aumento i casi di notizie inventate a bella posta, e per diversi scopi, pubblicate dai giornali. E gli esperti si chiedono il perché di questo fenomeno.

Lo sperma di Bob Dylan e Mick Jagger è stato rubato

Uno dei primi tentativi di Skaggs risale al luglio 1976, quando fece sapere alla stampa di aver appena aperto una banca dello sperma per rock star un centro cioè in cui le rock star avrebbero depositato il loro seme a beneficio delle fan. I giornali si gettarono sulla notizia. I cantanti Bob Dylan e Mick Jagger contattarono Skaggs, pronti a un'eventuale donazione. L'inventore annunciò una distribuzione gratuita di sperma per il bicentenario dell'Indipendenza nazionale americana. Accorsero in molti, ma a quel punto Skaggs rivelò che tutto il seme era stato rubato nottetempo. La televisione Usa Cbs trasmise un lungo reportage, con un dubbio amletico: «Si può parlare di rapimento di minore a questo stadio del concepimento?».

Ancora, alla fine del '90, Skaggs tese un'altra trappola. Questa volta si trattava dell'apertura di una clinica del sonno dove si poteva scegliere cosa sognare, dalla fantasia erotica più proibita alla vincita miliardaria. La struttura venne allestita nella villa di un amico di Skaggs. Anche in questo caso il nome del protagonista, dottor Schlafen, poteva aiutare a smascherare la burla: *schlafen*, in tedesco, si-

gnifica dormire. E invece la notizia rimbalzò fino in Europa: perfino il quotidiano italiano *il Giornale* pubblicò un lungo articolo.

Il cane accudito da uno stuolo di maggiordomi

Ma anche l'Italia ha il suo Skaggs: dietro lo pseudonimo Luther Blisset, dal nome di un calciatore decisamente brocco divenuto quasi per caso centravanti del Milan 15 anni fa, si cela un gruppo che da qualche anno si diverte a beffare i giornali. Un caso per tutti: nel '95 fecero credere che alla Biennale di Venezia si sarebbe esibito uno scimpanzè pittore. Ma ai giornalisti convenuti distribuirono un volantino: «La scimmia sei tu», firmato Luther Blisset.

Non c'entra Blisset invece in un altro famoso caso italiano. Quattro anni fa tutti i giornali diedero rilievo alla notizia che la miliardaria tedesca Carolina Liebschtein aveva lasciato in eredità 137 miliardi al cane Gunther. Con il patrimonio, Gunther si trasferì in una villa in Toscana, "accudito da uno stuolo di maggiordomi", come scrisse il quotidiano *la Repubblica*. Divenne presidente di una squadra di pallavolo (con cui vinse anche lo scudetto) e organizzò splendidi convegni internazionali di farmacologia.

In seguito Maurizio Mian, capofila della Gunther Foundation, associazione animalista di cui il cane era presidente, rivelò che Gunther non era mai esistito. Mian, il vero erede, voleva fare

pubblicità alle sue iniziative senza apparire in prima persona, e così aveva inventato la storia.

In altri casi capita che chi scrive una notizia falsa sia vittima non di un tranellò ma di un errore. Nel marzo del 1994 la Rai diede per morto lo sciatore Alberto Tomba perché un salumiere di Cortina, poco abile con l'inglese, credendo di sentire la notizia da un tg della Cnn, avvertì i Carabinieri, e questi avvertirono la Rai.

Ma perché i giornalisti ci cascano così spesso? Il modo per non inciampare in una notizia falsa, in teoria, esiste. Basta cioè che il controllo delle fonti, ovvero delle persone dalle quali provengono le no-

INDICE	INDICE	INDICE	INDICE
74 -0,02	981,08 -0,27	1177,47 -0,04	

Paese	Indice	Variazione
Italia	981,08	-0,27
Francia	1177,47	-0,04
Germania	1234,56	+0,12
Spagna	1056,78	-0,35
Portogallo	876,54	+0,08
Stati Uniti	1456,78	+0,15
Giappone	1123,45	-0,22
Regno Unito	1345,67	+0,05
Paesi Bassi	1567,89	-0,18
Canada	1234,56	+0,03
Australia	1098,76	-0,10
Corea del Sud	1432,10	+0,25
India	1678,90	-0,08
Brasile	1321,09	+0,18
Messico	1109,87	-0,12
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La metà degli italiani pensa che i giornali non siano più affidabili

► tizie, sia accurato. «Purtroppo questo non sempre accade», dice Gianni di Felice, docente alla Scuola di Giornalismo di Milano. «Le fonti dovrebbero essere sempre citate con nome e cognome, siano esse ordinarie, cioè il passante o il testimone occasionale di un fatto, o istituzionali. Se vogliono invece restare anonime, devono essere sempre rintracciabili, per un riscontro, dal giornalista».

Per ovvie ragioni, più una fonte è istituzionale, meno si controlla. Se il questore dice che la Squadra Mobile ha fatto dieci arresti, è normale che il cronista si fidi. Invece dovrebbe stare attento, perché la bufala si può nascondere perfino dietro un uniforme.

Windsurfiste nude, reggiseni e serpenti a Varazze

Fino a due anni fa dalla stazione dei Carabinieri di Varazze uscivano ad esempio in continuazione notizie clamorose: un ragazzino che bevendo dal rubinetto ingoia un serpentello, un camionista spagnolo che segnala due ragazze spogliarsi e lanciare i vestiti da un cavalcavia di Varazze (era l'epoca dei lanci di sassi), una misteriosa ragazza che di notte faceva nuda il windsurf. La fonte era sempre la stessa, un maresciallo dei Carabinieri che, guarda caso, non forniva mai alla stampa nomi, ma veniva comunque creduto.

«Del resto lo scherzo può celarsi ovunque, anche in un comunicato fax. Per questo bisogna sempre trovare un riscontro», dice

Giangiaco Schiavi, capocronista del *Corriere della Sera*. E infatti nel '95 alcuni giornali Usa annunciarono il convegno del "gruppo della scorrettezza politica", la *Southern Coalition for Political Incorrectness*. Ma il gruppo non esisteva: il fax che comunicava l'evento era partito dagli studenti di una scuola di giornalismo per vedere quanti avrebbero dato la notizia senza verificarla.

Falso con valenza politica fu anche il lancio di palloncini con scritte anticlericali durante una visita del Papa a Milano. La fotografia dei palloncini, pubblicata sui giornali, era stata scattata in un cortile e recapitata da un falso fotografo in redazione. Ci furono perfino mozioni di condanna in consiglio comunale.

Ma le bufale sui giornali non sono dovute solo alla negligenza. «Il sistema informativo è competitivo e a volte le ambizioni personali spingono a ingigantire i fatti», dice Tilde Giani Gallino, docente di psicologia a Torino. A sostegno della verità c'è, per fortuna, un altro meccanismo psicologico: «Chi parla con un giornalista si aspetta che questo controlli quanto gli viene riferito, così, tendenzialmente, dice il vero», sostiene Mario Morcellini, del dipartimento di sociologia dell'università La Sapienza. «Per di più, per un "ammalato di protagonismo" è già abbastanza apparire sul giornale: raccontare frottole non serve».



I tiri mancini alla Skaggs lasciano comunque un segno: secondo un sondaggio francese, il 60% dei lettori, in Europa, ritiene i giornali affidabili. In Italia la percentuale scende al 48. «I giornali scrivono ciò che vogliono», sostiene la maggioranza degli italiani. Ma ha torto: secondo uno studio dell'Ansa,

delle 73 mila notizie pubblicate in media in un anno da un giornale appena 4 sono bufale.

Mathilde Bonetti

Per saperne di più:

S. Casillo, S. Sica, F. Di Trocchio. *Falsi giornalistici* (Alfredo Guida editore). Tutte le bufale, raccolte da studiosi.

Ma se il giornalista specula, rischia anche la galera



Mentre la bufala è una notizia falsa costruita per prendere in giro i giornali, che se ci cascano la pubblicano, esistono altre

false notizie che invece nascono all'interno delle redazioni.

● **Falsi giornalistici.** Sono scoop inventati dal giornalista per far

I falsi diari di Hitler, venduti al giornale "Stern" da Konrad Kujau: fu condannato a 4 anni.

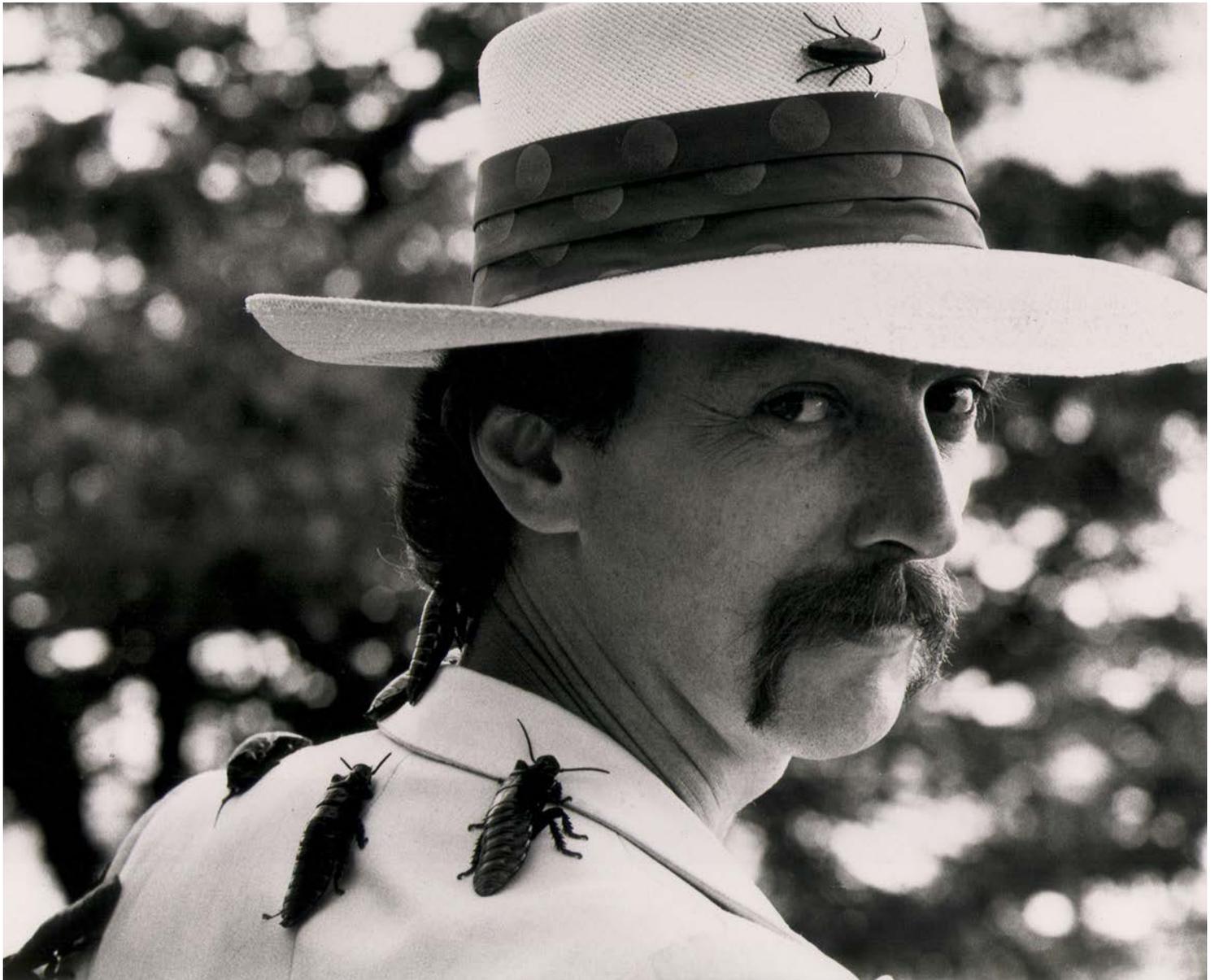


carriera. La cronista americana Janet Cooke vinse il Pulitzer nel 1981 scrivendo sul "Washington Post" la falsa storia di un eroinomane di soli 8 anni. Scoperta, perse il posto e il premio. Oggi fa la casalinga. All'inizio di quest'anno invece un reporter tedesco, Michael Born, è stato condannato a 4 anni di prigione per

truffa: ha venduto alle televisioni falsi servizi giornalistici su lavoro minorile e sette segrete.

● **Fattoidi.** Sono in pratica leggende metropolitane, cioè fatti strani noti a tutti che periodicamente vengono ripescati e romanizzati dai giornali. Tre anni fa è successo a Milano: in una via commerciale, corso

Buenos Aires, si era sparsa la voce che nel camerino di prova di un negozio ci fosse una botola dove le signore sparivano, per poi essere vendute come schiave nei Paesi arabi. Si diceva anche che una signora fosse riuscita a scappare al rapimento: la notizia venne pubblicata, ma la signora non fu mai trovata né intervistata.



**QUEL POLO PICCOLO
MA SE NASCE, COME SARÀ IL TERZO
POLO TELEVISIVO ITALIANO? INTERVISTE A OSCAR
MAMMI E A EMMANUELE MILANO DI TELEMONTECARLO**

prima

Comunicazione

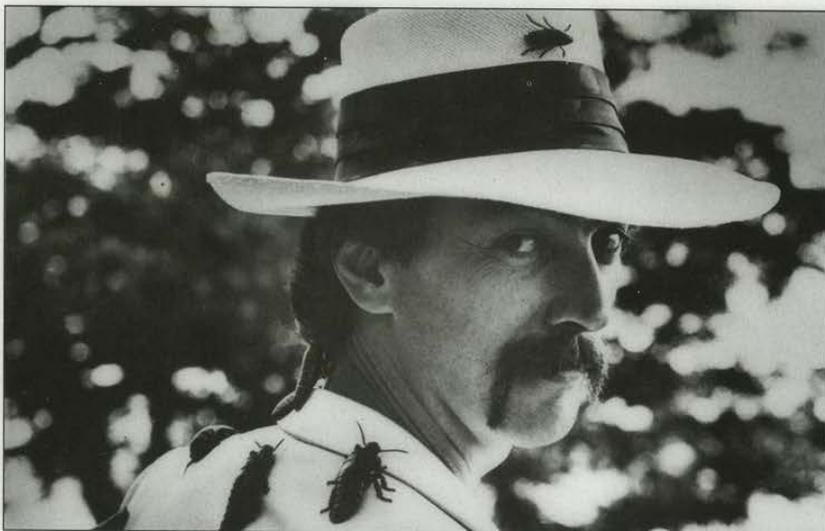
PRIMA COMUNICAZIONE N° 208 - MAGGIO 1992 - LIRE 10.000 - Sped. in abb. post. - Gruppo III/70 - Milano.

GEMINA A CACCIA DI TIVU'

**LA FINANZIARIA DI GIAMPIERO
PESENTI DECISA A COGLIERE
L'OPPORTUNITÀ DI ENTRARE NELLA
TIVÙ ATTRAVERSO LA SUA
CONTROLLATA RIZZOLI.
CON L'ASSISTENZA DELLA LEGGE
MAMMI E LA BENEDIZIONE
DELL'AVVOCATO GIANNI AGNELLI**

Giorgio Fattori,
presidente
di Res Editori

Personaggi



Joey Skaggs, 45 anni. La sua notizia bidone più recente è la lotteria per vendere il ponte di Brooklyn, voluta dal sindaco di New York per risolvere i problemi finanziari della città. L'agenzia Associated Press l'ha presa per buona al punto da diramarla sul circuito internazionale.

Il bufaliere

È Joey Skaggs, un artista newyorkese che da 25 anni inventa e mette in scena clamorose notizie bidone alle quali hanno abboccato tutti, dal 'New York Times' alla Cbs. Lo aiutano 25 amici, convinti come lui che dimostrare quanto sia facile la manipolazione dei media è l'unico modo per rendere più responsabili i giornalisti

Nelle trappole di Joey Skaggs ci sono cascati quasi tutti. Il *New York Times*, il network televisivo Cbs e molti altri come il *Chicago Tribune*, il *Philadelphia Inquirer*, il *New York Newsday*, il *Giornale di Montanelli*, il *Corriere della Sera* e *La Repubblica*. Il 'cacciatore di giornalisti' è un simpatico newyorkese un po' iconoclasta e con una strana passione: imbrogliare i media, costruire situazioni, avvenimenti e notizie bizzarre che i reporter di tutto il mondo prendono per veri, raccontano nei loro articoli e nelle loro trasmissioni per poi essere svergognati pubblicamente a causa della loro pigrizia e superficialità.

L'ultimo trofeo della sua vasta collezione è la finta lotteria per vendere il ponte di Brooklyn che il sindaco di New York avrebbe ideato per sanare i guai finanziari della città. Una bufala, un'invenzione alla quale ha creduto anche l'agenzia di stampa americana *Associated Press*, diramando la notizia sul circuito internazionale. Le due invenzioni precedenti in ordine di tempo sono *Hair Today*, un'agenzia che per mille dollari acquista capigliature da utilizzare dopo la morte del

proprietario per trapiantarle sui calvi; e Comacoon, una clinica che cura lo stress metropolitano con lunghe anestesie e droghe psichedeliche che vi trasportano nel mondo dei sogni che preferite. Tutto falso, ma pubblicato e trasmesso dai media.

Joey Skaggs scherza su tutto, o quasi. Il giorno dopo il nostro incontro ha già messo a segno un altro colpo al cuore dell'informazione mandando a una trasmissione a premi, alla quale era stato invitato, un suo amico e facendo credere a tutta la Nbc (uno dei tre network nazionali) che il sosia era proprio lui.

Le sue truffe hanno tutto l'aspetto di una vendetta, lasciano intravedere un rancore contro la categoria dei professionisti dell'informazione. Ma lui nega. "Non odio i giornalisti", assicura. "Tutt'altro. Voglio solo svelare al pubblico i punti deboli di questi professionisti per dimostrare quanto facile e pericolosa sia la manipolazione dei media. Giornali e televisione si lasciano manovrare dal governo, come nel caso della guerra del Golfo. E sono usati dalle grandi industrie tramite le agenzie di relazioni pubbliche. A

volte i giornalisti sono semplicemente vittime inconsapevoli di chi li manovra. Spesso, invece, sono vittime della propria incompetenza e dei limiti di tempo imposti dalla chiusura delle pagine. Ma bisogna capire che quando i media vengono manipolati, le vere vittime siamo noi: i lettori o i telespettatori ai quali viene propinata una menzogna. Siamo noi a soffrirne, non loro".

Joey è un artista. Dipinge, recita molto bene con una gestualità da mimo, parla e scrive in modo molto articolato, conosce i linguaggi della corporation, degli esperti di relazioni pubbliche e delle redazioni. E proprio grazie a queste preziose qualità è riuscito a raggirare i migliori nomi del giornalismo.

Il metodo è semplice, ma ingegnoso. Skaggs escogita un'idea e da questa fabbrica un personaggio, studia la regia dell'imbroglio come se fosse un film, affitta locali dove ambientarlo, recluta amici per orchestrare l'inganno. Ha 25 collaboratori per le messe in scena più semplici e un massimo di 70 complici per i trucchi più elaborati.

→
ti. Sono attori, ex studenti, persone che condividono le sue opinioni, che credono in quello che fa. E godono nel tirare giù i pantaloni al quarto potere. Lo fanno gratis, per divertimento, per vendetta o per sentirsi forti. "Perché c'è una sensazione di potenza", confessa il capo-burla, "nello scoprire che si può manipolare l'informazione".

Skaggs, proprio come un regista, sceglie gli attori più adatti, prepara le parti e le battute di ognuno. Poi passa alla 'fase mass media'. Invia comunicati stampa alle agenzie e alle redazioni dei giornali invitandoli a partecipare a una conferenza stampa. E si acquatta come un gatto davanti alla tana del topo. Appena esce un articolo è fatta: abboccano subito anche gli altri. Lo scherzo termina quando un giornalista particolarmente scrupoloso scopre la truffa. E Skaggs se la ride.

Lo incontriamo da Rocco, un ottimo ristorante nel Village. Skaggs, 45 anni, capelli neri che gli coprono la nuca ma radi sulla fronte, baffi cespugliosi, sguardo intenso e mani in continuo movimento, ci rivela subito le sue radici italiane, anzi partenopee. La mamma è di origini napoletane, si chiamava Bonuso. "Forse per questo ho un forte senso dell'ironia e mi piacciono gli scherzi", dice. Il suo motto, parafrasando l'attore comico americano W.C. Fields, è questo: "Se vuoi dire la verità, cerca di far ridere o la gente ti ucciderà". Durante la nostra



Un membro della Fat Squad, il commando anticiccia del dottor Joe Bones.

chiacchierata il Pulcinella dei media nasconde uno scarafaggio di plastica sotto alla tazza del caffè. Ma poi ridiventa serio ed estrae tre libroni di pelle nera nei quali ha raccolto gli articoli sulle orribili figuracce che ha fatto fare a molti cronisti (vedi box).

Per molti anni Skaggs è stato semplicemente un 'performance artist', un artista che si esprime con rappresentazioni teatrali all'aperto. Nell'81 organizzò un cenone in onore della fame nel mondo davanti al palazzo delle Nazioni Unite, a New York. Ospiti: un gruppo di attori seduti attorno a una lunga tavola imbandita con al centro

uno scheletro di bambino appoggiato sopra a una bara. Uno schiaffo morale all'inadeguatezza degli aiuti al Terzo mondo.

Oppure: negli anni Settanta i borghesi della periferia newyorkese invadevano ogni weekend il quartiere bohémien dell'East Village per fotografare gli hippies. Così una domenica Skaggs riempì un autobus di hippies e li portò a fotografare i borghesi nei loro quartieri, mentre facevano la spesa, tagliavano l'erba in giardino, chiacchieravano, prendevano il sole.

Fu proprio in seguito a uno di questi happening artistici che il rapporto di Skaggs con i media si incrinò. Era il Natale del 1967. Joey aveva organizzato un presepe vietnamita al Central Park di New York: Maria, Giuseppe, Gesù, i pastori, tutti vestiti come contadini vietnamiti. Non era ancora l'epoca delle critiche e delle dimostrazioni contro la guerra in Vietnam. "Allora chiunque protestasse", ricorda Skaggs, "era automaticamente uno sporco comunista, frocio e antiamericano". Joey fece appostare dietro i cespugli una truppa di attori travestiti da soldati americani. A un suo segnale uscirono all'improvviso, fingendo di trucidare la sacra famiglia vietnamita. Furono arrestati tutti e multati per avere insozzato il parco con volantini pacifisti. Il *New York Times*, il giorno dopo, riportava la notizia con questo titolo: 'Gli hippies del presepe arrestati per avere sporcato il parco'.

I tranelli d'oro di quel burlone di Joey

Ecco le notizie bidone più clamorose ideate da Joey Skaggs negli ultimi 25 anni.

L'OCEANO SU TAVOLA A VELA

Joey ha una piccola casa alle Hawaii dove si ritira per nascondersi da tutti e dipingere i suoi quadri. Lì, aiutato da alcuni complici, ha organizzato un finto avvenimento sportivo: la traversata del Pacifico su un windsurf. Musica, fotografi, annunci, dichiarazioni, tuta idrorepellente, e Joey parte sulla tavola a vela determinato a raggiungere la costa americana dopo aver attraversato l'oceano. Quello che nessuno sapeva è che Joey, invece, si sarebbe fermato dietro l'uscita del porto e, nascosto dagli scogli, avrebbe raggiunto un complice per essere trasportato a riva. Il giorno dopo, per colazione si nutre solo di ritagli stampa e si sazia di risate. Non sono le ultime, anzi.

PILLOLE DI SCARAFAGGIO

Pensate per un momento al dottor Gregor. Ha allevato una razza di su-

per scarafaggi dando loro vitamine e steroidi. Da questi insettoni, grandi come un piede, estrae un ormone particolare che permette a queste bestie di sopravvivere anche a forti radiazioni nucleari. Constatato il successo della sua scoperta, Gregor decide di produrre in gran quantità pillole di scarafaggio che, giura lo strano inventore, rendono anche l'uomo invulnerabile alle radiazioni nucleari. Comunicati stampa, fotografie, dimostrazioni scientifiche, commenti eccelsi e (falsi) ritagli di articoli scritti su di lui giustificavano la convocazione di un'importante conferenza stampa. Nessuno dei reporter accorsi alla conferenza si è ricordato che Gregor Samsa è il ragazzo che nella 'Metamorfosi' di Kafka si trasforma in scarafaggio. E Joey ride ancora.

SPERMA ROCK

Anche Giuseppe Scaggioli non era altro che l'italianizzazione di Joey Skaggs. Giuseppe è un banchiere, ma le cassette di sicurezza del suo istituto sono diverse dalle solite: picco-

li frigoriferi pieni di strane provette che contengono lo sperma di cantanti rock per permettere alle fan più scatenate di avere un figlio dal loro idolo preferito. La banca dello sperma di Scaggioli ha attirato centinaia di chiamate: sembra impossibile, ma

c'è più di una persona che vuole un figlio che assomigli a Bob Dylan, e Scaggioli naturalmente assicura di avere parecchi depositi dal cantante americano. "Lo scherzo sulla banca dello sperma delle celebrità mi venne in mente sfogliando le pagine gialle", spiega Joey. "Telefonai a una banca del-



La clinica antistress del

Personaggi

"Fui sconvolto", racconta Skaggs. "Com'è possibile, mi domandai, che il *New York Times* possa ignorare il significato del mio spettacolo, rendendo inutile il mio gesto di protesta, ridicolizzandolo perché contrario al pensiero politico del giornalista o del giornale? Decisi allora di essere coerente con questa scoperta e di vendicarmi attraverso quella che io considero un'azione socio-politica, cioè i miei tranelli. Da allora non mi sono più fermato".

Ma lo scherzo vero e proprio è solo la prima parte del "gesto artistico e di critica" di Joey Skaggs. La seconda parte consiste nello spiegare ai giornalisti che ci sono cascati la ragione dei suoi tranelli. "Quando la corrispondente del *Giornale*, Silvia Kramar, mi telefonò credendo che fossi il dottor Schlafer, io le proposi di venirmi a trovare. Le avrei rivelato tutto, anche perché ero già stato smascherato. Ma lei, per pigrizia o per problemi di tempo, dopo vari rinvii mi domandò se poteva intervistarmi per telefono. Così decisi di punirla. E lei pubblicò la notizia della clinica Comacoon in prima pagina. Poi il *Corriere della Sera* scrisse della truffa. E infine *Il Giornale* pubblicò l'articolo con la spiegazione".

Ecco, la seconda parte — sottolinea l'artista della truffa — quella della

smentita e delle spiegazioni ai lettori, è molto più importante della prima. È la parte educativa per i giornalisti e per chi li ascolta o li legge.

Ma non tutti i giornalisti sono pronti ad accettare Joey Skaggs come tutore dell'etica dell'informazione. Silvia Kramar ci confessa che si sta organizzando una sorta di società delle vittime di Joey Skaggs. È un gruppo internazionale di giornalisti che stanno pre-



Skaggs nei panni dello zingaro Jo-Jo, che vuole cambiare nome alla 'tarma zingara'.

parando una vendetta: faranno circolare comunicati stampa falsi con dichiarazioni sconvenienti firmati da Joey Skaggs. "Cosa vuole Skaggs?", commenta la Kramar. "Pubblicità. E noi gliela daremo. Le sue burle dovrebbero servire a ricordarci che il nostro mestiere va fatto dal vivo e non con i lanci stampa. Anche la guerra del Golfo e la Cnn hanno dimostrato che la rapidità va spesso a scapito della veridicità delle nostre fonti. Però lui lo fa anche per diventare famoso e per divertirsi. Infatti il giorno dopo l'uscita del mio articolo mi è venuto a trovare per farsi vedere di persona. Lo avrei ammazzato".

I suoi scherzi sono innocui, si disciopa Skaggs, nessuno si fa male, a parte qualche ego ammaccato e qualche orgoglio ferito. "È vero", ammette, "sono un arrabbiato e lo sono da molti anni. Non sono nessuno, ma non accetto i soprusi. I giornalisti devono riconoscere che quello che raccontano è un'interpretazione, non una verità oggettiva. Già il fatto che alla televisione tutte le notizie di un giorno siano condensate in mezz'ora implica una selezione basata solo sull'opinione dei redattori. E così i giornalisti fanno la storia. Ma com'è possibile credere nella storia quando è così facile da inventare"?

Carlo Pizzati

lo sperma, la visitai, mi documentai. E poi preparai il colpo. Trovo ispirazioni ovunque. Siamo tutti delle spugne e assorbiamo idee da quello che ci circonda".

DIGIUNO O BOTTE

Per soli 300 dollari al giorno (circa 400mila lire) il dottor Joe Bones vi visita a domicilio. Ma non viene da solo, arriva con il suo commando anti-

ciccia: possenti grassoni vestiti da Guardian Angels che si piazzano davanti al frigorifero e vi proibiscono di mangiare. Voi vi preparate la pasta al pomodoro? Loro ve la tolgono da sotto il naso e se vi lamentate sono guai. È l'ultima spiaggia per gli obesi americani, certo una soluzione drastica, una dieta violenta, ma a volte ne-

cessaria. Naturalmente è tutto falso. E, come se non bastasse, questa volta Skaggs ha utilizzato, come spesso fa per rendere più crudeli le sue burle, uno pseudonimo che camuffa il suo vero nome, ma contemporaneamente è un nome rivelatore. Joe, infatti, è un diminutivo di Joey e Bones significa ossa. Ma pochi hanno capito l'ironia. Skaggs ha addirittura raggrato uno stesso giornalista televisivo per due volte a distanza di pochi mesi. Eppure, dice, era proprio facile capire l'inganno.

SOGNI D'ORO

'Stanchi dello stress quotidiano? Venite dal dottor Schlafer', diceva la pubblicità. Herr Schlafer (che significa dormiglione in tedesco) vi promette una cura incomparabile per la stanchezza della vita: sogni stimolati da speciali apparecchiature che vi fanno immaginare di essere nel luogo e in compagnia di chi preferite. Riempite un modulo stampato su un dépliant, nel quale dichiarate senza segreti le vostre più azzardate fantasie, e doktor Dormiglione le trasformerà in realtà. La sua clinica si chiama Comacoon, cioè 'bozzolo per comatosi'. Ma neanche questo è servi-

to a svelare chi si nascondeva sotto al camice dello scienziato.

"Io non voglio istigare al cinismo", commenta Joey. "Ma mettendo in dubbio la credibilità dei giornalisti do un bello scossone al significato del loro lavoro. E questo li esorta a migliorarsi, a essere più precisi e più attenti alle notizie che ci comunicano ogni giorno".

GIÙ LE MANI DAGLI ZINGARI

Jo-Jo lo zingaro appariva per le strade di Manhattan con un grande cartello. "Basta con i soprusi linguistici contro gli zingari", urlava. "Non è ammissibile che la tarma zingara abbia questo nome offensivo", protestava. La 'gypsy moth', tarma zingara appunto, è un insettino chiamato così per le sue tendenze nomadi, ma Jo-Jo (anche questo un diminutivo di Joey) non voleva sentire ragioni. "È un nome razzista, chiamatela come volete, ma non tarma zingara". Il *New York Times* pubblicò la notizia dicendo che si trattava di una nuova organizzazione per le rivendicazioni etniche. E Joey aggiunse un altro illustre ritaglio al suo librone di pelle nera.



dottor Schlafer.



ヘルパー8人がナマ証言!「新人が逃げ出す介護実態」

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米国で一流科学者150人が協力して、裁判を自動化するスーパーコンピュータを開発した。これを使えば、どんなに複雑難解な裁判でも、瞬時に正確な判決を下すことができる——そう聞かされても、半信半疑の方が多いかもしれない。しかし国際的に名高いCNNが、トップニュースでこれを報じたとしたら？



▲犬の娼家
——愛犬家なら、ついひっかかりそう
◀ボードセーリング
——ボードに乗ってハワイからカリフォルニア目指す。当人が海の上で、取材できないところがミソ



「なぜか笑える」 マヌケな男が騙す



有カメディアも次々えじきに

結論から言えば、コンピューター判決の話は全くのどっち上げだ。しかし、これを真実としてCNNが報道したのは、本当の話である。
CNNの社史に汚点として残るであろう、歴史的誤報が発生したのは1995年12月のこと。当時、世界中を騒がせたO・J・シン普森の刑

事訴訟で、妻殺しの容疑をかけられていた同被告に無罪が言い渡された直後だ。

裁判の行方を見守っていた誰もが、判決に疑問を抱いた。その時、CNNのニュース・ルームに、奇妙な記者会見の招待状が届いた——「ソロモン・プロジェクト・裁判自動化プログラムが、シン普森に有罪判決」。

「我々は並列スーパーコンピュータと人工知能を組み合わせた、裁判自動化システムを開発しました。これを使えば、頼りにならない判事も、信用できない陪審員も要

んだ。実験室らしき部屋には無数のコンピューターが並び、30人ほどの科学者が真剣な顔で作業している。

CNNの記者の前に、ソロモン・プロジェクトの責任者で、ニューヨーク大学教授のボスノ博士が説明する。

「我々は並列スーパーコンピュータと人工知能を組み合わせた、裁判自動化システムを開発しました。これを使えば、頼りにならない判事も、信用できない陪審員も要

ジョイ・スカッグス氏



特ダネ、を報じる米国の各紙

りません」
 いかにも学者肌のボスノ博士の語り口は、落ち着いて自信に満ちている。CNNは特集番組で、このソロモン・プロジェクトを報じた。
 しかし後日、これは架空の人間を主人公にした、完全な作り話であることが判明した。

「ボスノ博士」と自らを偽った男の本名は、ジョイ・スカッグス(53)。メディア関係者の間では、知る人ぞ知る「Prankster(食わせ者)」だ。CNNの記者が目撃した科学者たちは、スカッグスが雇ったエキストラ俳優だった。CNNは翌年1月、訂正を放送した。
 スカッグスは1968年以來、こうした巧妙な作り話を

カネ儲けのためではない

だからといって、スカッグスは、これで金を儲けるわけではない(大学の非常勤講師をして生計をたてている)。プロジェクトにむしる多大な資金と労力を費やしている。なぜ、こんなことをするのか。動機は後で説明するとして、まずは彼の代表的「仕事」を紹介しておこう。

●犬の娼家(1976年)

「性的欲求不満に悩む、ニューヨークの飼い犬に朗報。マンハッタンにある『犬の娼家』では、飼い主が50ドルを払

餌に、40回近くにわたってメディアを騙し続け、そのすべてで成功を収めてきた。犠牲となったメディアには、ニューヨーク・タイムズ、ワシントン・ポスト、ボストン・グローブ、AP、UPI、ABC、CBS……と、そうそうたる名前が連なる。これら大メディアに、中小のテレビ局や新聞も含めれば、数え切れないほどだ。

●ファット・スカッド(肥満撃滅隊)(1986年)

「肥満は現代文明の敵だ」と、元海軍軍曹ジョー・ボーン(実はスカッグス)が結成した「ファット・スカ

ッド(肥満撃滅隊)」が、潜在需要3400万人の米ダイエット市場に奇襲攻撃をかける。腕利きの隊員が、肥満者を3交代制で24時間監視。医師の許したカロリリー以上の食物は一口たりとも食べさせない。契約金は1日当たり300ドルで、最低3日間必要。一度契約したら途中解約はできない。「おかげで、こんなにやせることができました」。

●犬肉レストラン(1994年)

在米韓国人のキム・ヤン・スー(スカッグス)は、全米の野犬収容施設1500か所に、つたない英語で以下のような手紙を送った。
 「私は韓国レストランを経営する者ですが、お家で収容している犬を、100ドルで買って出します」
 噂を聞きつけた各地のテレ

ビ局や新聞が報道。全米から非難の電話がキム・ヤン・スーに押し寄せるが、なぜかいつも留守録モードになっている。実は報道したメディアでさえ、キムと直接話した社はない。完全な噂話にメディアが踊らされたケース。

無責任な報道への警鐘

スカッグスは、なぜ、このような悪戯を繰り返すのか。記者の問いかけに、彼は次のように答える。

「我々は生まれた瞬間から、批判的思考と分析を停止するよう教育される。家庭、学校、企業、宗教団体、あらゆる組織が、人間の批判能力を殺してしまう。それをさらに助長するのがメディアなのです。ジャーナリストは専門家でもないのに、その報道を人々は無条件に信用してしまふ。私はそれに警鐘を鳴らしたい」
 スカッグスは60年代、ニューヨークのグリニッジ・ビレッジで絵画や彫刻などを手が

ける、芸術家としてスタートした。その当時の地元新聞が、ビレッジ住民に関して誤

解を招く報道をして以来、メディアを懐疑的に見るようになったという。その無責任な

報道姿勢を逆手に取った、作り話で逆襲を試みるようになったのだ。

スカッグスはメディアを騙すコツを「現実のほんの数歩先に行くこと」と表現する。どんなに面白い話でも、現実とかけ離れていれば最初から信用されない。しかし、「最近はこのバランスをとることが、急に難しくなってきた」と彼はこぼす。原因はインターネットである。

過ぎなかったが、精子バンクはその後、現実化した。今回の「美人モデルの卵子競売」は、さらに意表を突く話だ。まさに現実が虚構に追いつき、追い越してしまつたと言える。しかしNYハンター・カレッジのクレイ・シャーキー教授の調べによれば、「卵子競売」はウェブ・サイトが作られただけで実際に競売が成

た。噂はたちどころに広まり、宗教・教育団体が非難する一方で、両者に「頑張り、負けるな」という励ましの声も多数寄せられた。新聞やテレビも報じ、「初体験」放送当日の8月4日、2人のウェブ・サイトにはアクセスが集中した。その結果回線がパンクし、放送は実現しなかった。しかし、そもそも2人は当日、「行為」に及ばなかったようである。土壇場でおじけづいたのか、最初から騙すつもりだったのか。これに関する新聞・テレビ報道は、誤報になるのか、ならないのか。

インターネット時代の報道：

真実と虚構の境目が曖昧に

カッグスの悩みが理解できる。たとえば、今年10月には米国のポルノ写真家が、「インターネット上で美人モデルの卵子を競売にかける」というサービスを開始し、世界中のメディアが大々的に報道した。実はスカッグスは1976年に、これと似た話でメディアを騙している。「有名人の精子を集めて売る精子バンク」がそれだ。当時は作り話に

立した形跡はない」という。当の写真家は本気と言うが、このまま行けば企画倒れだ。そうなると、これは真のニュースと言えるのか、それとも世間の関心を引くための作り話に過ぎなかったのか。似たような話は昨年も起きている。米国の男女高校生が、2人の「初体験」の様子をビデオ撮影し、インターネット上で生放送すると発表し

た。噂はたちどころに広まり、宗教・教育団体が非難する一方で、両者に「頑張り、負けるな」という励ましの声も多数寄せられた。新聞やテレビも報じ、「初体験」放送当日の8月4日、2人のウェブ・サイトにはアクセスが集中した。その結果回線がパンクし、放送は実現しなかった。しかし、そもそも2人は当日、「行為」に及ばなかったようである。土壇場でおじけづいたのか、最初から騙すつもりだったのか。これに関する新聞・テレビ報道は、誤報になるのか、ならないのか。



ファット・スカッド—何となく頼もしい面々だが…

「その時から私は、絵画と彫刻という伝統的媒体を捨て、メディアを私のメディア（表現媒体）とすることに決めたのです」（スカッグス）
彼に言わせれば、作り話は単なる作り話ではなく、世相を反映した痛烈な風刺が利いていなければならない。
確かに、「ソロモン・プロジェクト」は米国の裁判制度の欠陥を、「犬の娼家」は行き過ぎたペット・ブームを、「ファット・スカッド」は現代人の過剰なまでのダイエツト志向を揶揄したものだ。
「犬肉レストラン」がテレビ放送された直後、韓国系レストランだけでなく、アジア

人社会全体に嫌がらせの電話や手紙が殺到した。
「アジア人は何て野蛮なんだ。さつさとアメリカを去って郷里に帰れ」
普段はひた隠しにされているアジア人への偏見と差別感が、メディア報道によって一気に噴出した格好だった。
スカッグスは
「根本的な問題は、差別報道を受け入れる社会の土壌にある。アジア人社会に対する偏見があったからこそ、メディアは私の話に飛びついてきた」と言う。
それにしても30年間で40回も悪戯を繰り返してきたのに、なぜバレないのだろう。
「メディア自身が昔の報道を忘れてしまうからです。CNNは5回も騙されている。訂正報道は形ばかりの短い物で、まるで出さないメディアもある」
いまだに彼の作り話を真実と信じている人々も、実は多いのである。
(ニューヨーク在住ジャーナリスト・小林雅一)

PLAYBOY



Vse, kar moške zabava

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10 STRANI NESLUTENIH UŽITKOV SLOVENKA ANDREJA MED PORNO ELITO

EKSKLUZIVNO V PLAYBOJU

INTERVJU
Will SMITH

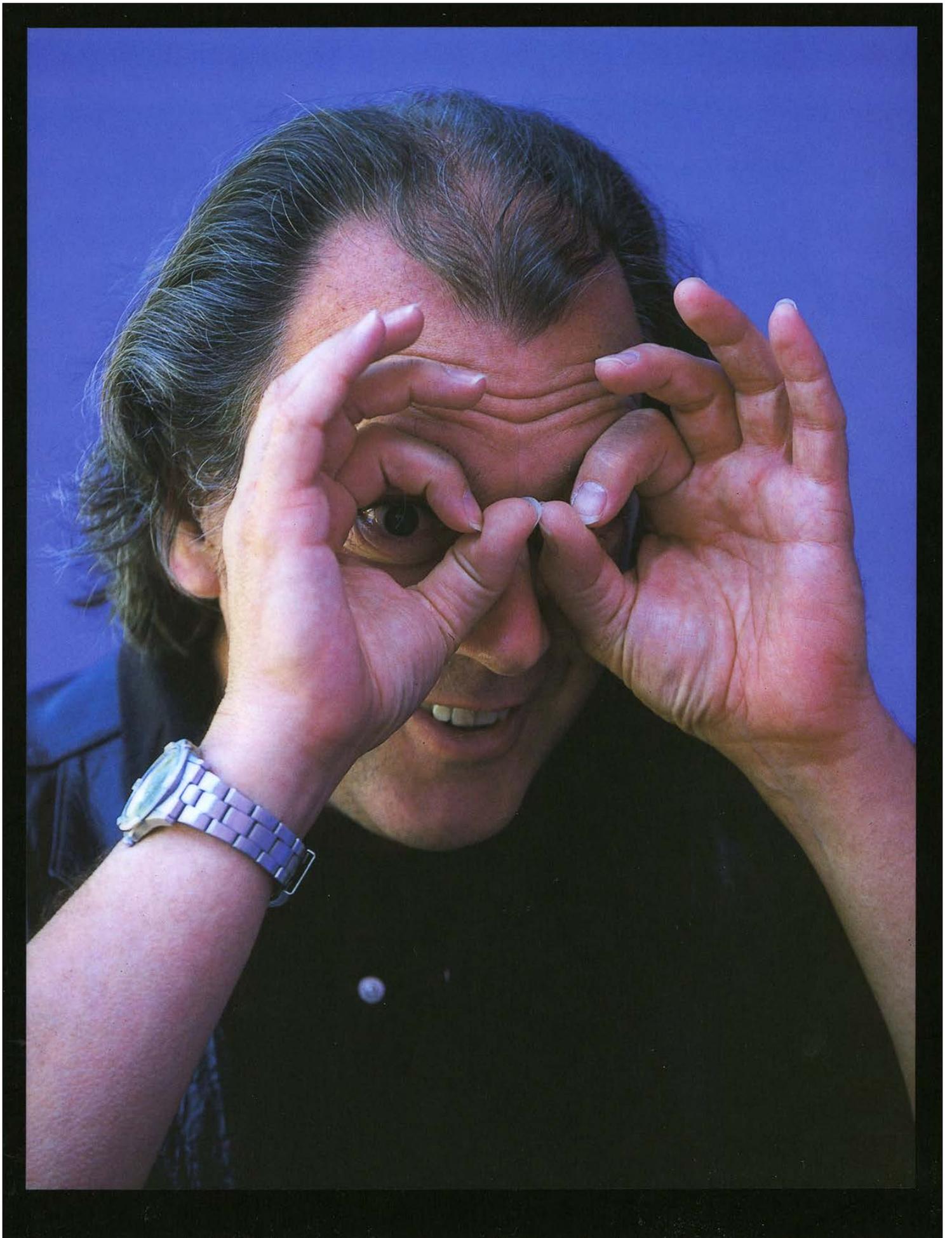
MISS AFGANISTANA

Bila je samo ena. V vsej zgodovini.
Moderna, zahodnjaška in lepa.
Samo v slovenskem PLAYBOJU

Slastna ritka Brazilije

ELLEN





Joey Skaggs

DELA STVARI, KI SO, A JIH NI

Ta svetovno znani medijski šaljivec je umetnik, ki rad pove, da so njegovo platno mediji. Z njegovimi barvami so se umazala tako prestižna imena, kot sta CNN in The New York Times. Slovenske je zmedel z globalno potegavščino BioPEEP, zato pa so ga tako veličastno »spregledali« ob zgodbi o domnevem svetovnem računalniškem prvaku Matjažu Roglju, ki zlagoma dobiva sodni epilog. Je preslepil tudi naš poligraf? Preverite!

TEKST Barbara Bizjak ■ FOTO Borut Krajnc

1. *Ob 1. aprilu, dnevu norcev, vsako leto pripravite parado, ki je sicer nikoli ni, a nanjo vedno čakajo televizijske kamere. Letošnjaja je že sedemnajsta po vrsti.*

Vsako leto pride veliko ljudi, kar je neverjetno. Sporočilo za javnost, v katerem napovem dogodek, razpošljem po vsej državi in ker ga mediji dobijo vedno znova, mislijo, da v New Yorku dejansko obstaja taka čudna parada. Pridejo pa tudi povsem običajni ljudje. In ne zgodi se nič. Parade ni. Letos opozarjam, da bo med sodelujočimi veliko ljudi, ki se bodo izdajali za teroriste, da bodo ob poti položene mine, kar bo povečalo razburljivost dogodka. Na čelu parade bodo agenti CIA, FBI, FAA ... in predsednik Bush, ki se bodo med gorenjem stolpnice WTC in Pentagona praskali po glavi. V sprevedu bo tudi Osama bin Laden, ki bo vozil taksi, župan Bloomberg bo delil dolarske bankovce, Ariel Sharon grozil, ameriški taliban John Walker pa bo skušal pobegniti. Vse skupaj je zelo preprosto in morda celo najboljša newyorška parada. Nobene svinjarije, ki bi jo bilo treba pospraviti, nobenega dovoljenja ne potrebuješ, je skrajno poceni ...

2. *Sliši se drzno. Sploh za ameriške razmere. Imate sicer glede na protiteroristično zakonodajo ameriške vlade še kaj maneverskega prostora? Boste še lahko ustvarjali kot doslej?*

Kaj me čaka kot umetnika? Kaj čaka ves svet, je boljše vprašanje. Gledam in razmišljam, stvari pa se hitro spreminjajo. Toda moje prepričanje, da povem, kar si mislim, se ni spremenilo. Kljub grožnjam zmanjšanja državljskih pravic v imenu varnosti domovine moramo izražati tudi nasprotna mnenja.

3. *Ste Newyorčan. Kako ste doživljali 11. september in kako se v mestu znajdete zdaj?*

Ni mi treba poudarjati, kako pretresen, jezen, a hkrati žalosten in preplašen sem bil po terorističnih napadih na New York in Washington 11. septembra. Imam studio v Sohu, kar ni daleč od

Vsi cariniki ob mojem prihodu v Slovenijo so vedeli, kdo sem.

WTC-ja. Celoten okoliš je bil neposredno prizadet zaradi te katastrofe. Kdor ni mogel dokazati, da tod prebiva, ni imel dostopa vanj. Konstantno spremljam medije, osrednje in alternativne ter tuje. Gledam slike, poslušam komentarje in prevzema me čudna mešanica občutij. Gledam našo vlado, kako meče bombe in riž, pa potem najame Hollywood in piarovce na Madison Avenue, da ustvarjajo propagando in z njo manipulirajo ljudi, da bi ti verjeli, kako moramo izslediti naše sovražnike, jih ujeti v njihovih luknjah in pripeljati pred pravico, ne da bi se sploh vprašali, zakaj imamo take sovražnike. In potem gledam, kako druga stran grozi z biološkim in jedrskim orožjem, ki lahko izniči zahodni svet. Hkrati me skrbi zaradi vladne politike, ki grozi, da bo zmanjšala naše pravice zaradi nenadnega spoznanja, da imamo sovražnika, ki ga ne moremo ujeti. Kaj bo z demokracijo? Moja ustvarjalnost cveti in moje delo obstaja samo zaradi svoboščin, ki mi jih dovoljuje ta država. Trenutna grozljiva resničnost mi omogoča, da sem sarkastičen in ciničen, toda sam imam raje satiro.

4. *Kako vroče pa je bilo vaše razmerje z Matjažem Rogljem? Sprva ste slovenskim novinarjem priznali, da gre za vašo ukano, potem ste vse skupaj zanižali. Je še kaj, kar bi o tem želeli povedati?*

Pravzaprav ne, čeprav stvar še zdaleč ni končana. Tudi kar se tiče posledic za novinarje, saj študentje novinarstva tu v Sloveniji dokumentirajo ta fenomen. Vsekakor pa je zelo zanimivo, celo smešno, da so vsi cariniki ob mojem prihodu v Slovenijo vedeli, kdo sem.

5. *Pa ste tudi drugod tako znani kot v Sloveniji, kjer vas očitno pozna že vsak uradnik?*

Imam že kar dolg umetniški staž, katerega posledica je, da me ljudje poznajo. Ali me imajo radi, pa je drugo vprašanje. Narava mojega dela je, da sem provokativen, ikonoklastičen, da ljudje zaradi tega besnijo.

6. *Vaše potegavščine, predvsem v retrospektivi, so sicer zelo smešne. Pa ste prepričani, da ljudje, ki se sicer krohotajo vašemu početju, razumejo, kaj ste jim pravzaprav želeli sporočiti, kateri problem ste osvetlili?*

Ljudi učim medijske pismenosti. Toda moje delovanje se je razvijalo postopoma. Začel sem kot zelo resen slikar in kipar. Sčasoma pa sem spoznal, da imajo mediji moč spreminjanja in spreobračanja vsebine mojega dela. Kot protest proti vojni v Vietnamu sem postavil vietnamsko vas, ki naj bi jo zažgali, toda mediji so pisali, da onesnažujemo okolje. Moja prva dela torej niso vsebovala veliko humorja. Dodajal sem ga postopoma in prepričan sem, da sem s tem ljudi vzbudil k razmisleku, v kaj verjamejo in zakaj.

7. *Sami pravite, da mediji le redko objavijo popravke in javnost obvestijo, da ni čudežnega zdravila iz ščurkov, da moški, ki se je v večerajšnji oddaji izdajal za Joeyja Skaggsa, ni Skaggs ... Ljudje pravzaprav nimajo možnosti, da bi izvedeli, da je nekaj, v kar so verjeli, napačno.*

V splošnem je to res, res pa je tudi, da včasih posamezne medijske hiše z velikim veseljem sporočajo, da so se druge hiše zmotile. Če bo ABC naredil napako, se mu bodo pri NBC, CBS ali CNN z veseljem sladko smejali. Včasih tega sicer nočejo, posebno ko sem vpleten jaz, saj me nočejo izpostavljati. Vendar pa obstaja dovolj alternativnih medijev, tako da sporočilo pride do ljudi. Posebej internet.

8. *O potegavščini z bordelom za pse so se mediji na široko razpisali in se v glavnem zgražali nad njim. ABC-jeva ekipa pa je o tem posnela dokumentarec, ki je bil menda nominiran tudi za emmyja ...*

In ga je tudi dobil! Ves ta čas sem bil prepričan, da je bil le nominiran, pa ga potem ni dobil, ker pač temelji na prevari! Ženska, ki ga je naredila, je še zdaj prepričana, da je pasji bordel res obstajal in da sem rekel, da gre za prevaro, samo zato, da bi se izognil težavam z zakonom. Nora je, nora!

9. *Kadar vas vprašajo, katera od vaših potegavščin je najboljša, odgovorite, da bo to naslednja. In če vas vprašam, katera doslej je bila najboljša?*

Težko vprašanje. Mobilna spovednica je bila zelo uspešna in zelo preprosta, čeprav je gradnja spovednice in tricikla zahtevala veliko časa in denarja. Najtežje pri vsem je bilo iskanje parkirnega prostora za spovednico v New Yorku. Globalno zastavljene potegavščine pa zahtevajo mesece, leta priprav. Res nimam najljubše potegavščine, saj z vsako opozarjam na drugo vprašanje. Ocenjujem jih na treh stopnjah: ali me je ideja zadovoljila in ali sem jo lahko izvedel, koliko ljudi je nasedlo in potem govorilo o vprašanih, ki sem jih želel izpostaviti, ter ali koncept živi in ljudje o njem govorijo še čez leta. Potegavščina mora imeti namen, vsebino, ustrezno tehniko in tisti magični element, ki vznemirja. Včasih pa kaj pade z neba kot to, kar se je dogajalo v Sloveniji. Nobenega namena se nisem imel igrati z Rogljem, toda mediji so me okrivili, mediji so rekli, da sem odgovoren, da kaže, kot da sem za tem jaz.

10. *Zaradi svojega početja ste imeli težave z zakonom ...*

Da, veliko. Je pa smešno, da me je policija prišla rešit, ko sem igral duhovnika z mobilno spovednico. Napadle so me militantne feministke, med njimi tudi lezbijke, ki so mislile, da sem član duhovščine. Na spovednico so lepile znake za pravico do splava, ena pa mi je na prsi pribila nalepko, na kateri je pisalo: Fukam, da mi pride, in ne, da bi spočela! Nisem ji mogel reči: hej, tudi jaz! Držati sem se moral vloge. Tudi to je včasih velik izziv, saj se znajdeš v absurdnih situacijah, ki so lahko nevarne. Predstavljajte si goreče katolike pa varuhe živali, ki razbijajo stvari. Nikoli ne veš, kaj boš izzval. Kot sem že rekel, ne naslavljam ljudi, ki mislijo tako kot jaz, ampak splošno javnost.

11. *Se kdaj naveličate svojega početja?*

Se. Takrat denimo slikam. No, tudi ljudje se naveličajo tistih, ki so deležni preveč pozornosti. Ne jemljejo jih resno. Zato jih rad puščam v negotovosti, da ugibajo, kaj počnem. Pozornost je zame pravzaprav negativna. Če ljudje vedo, kdo si, je težje izvesti trik.

12. *Vaše potegavščine so drage, vendar z njimi, pravite, ne služite denarja. Kaj torej počnete? Imate bogato ženo, ste podedovali bogastvo?*

Nisem poročen, nikoli nisem ničesar podedoval. A ljudje se velikokrat sprašujejo, od kod mi denar, zato bom natan-

čen. Poučeval sem na umetniških fakultetah, prodajal svoja dela. Kot sem že rekel: začel sem kot slikar in kipar. Torej sem umetnik ...

13. *In imate papir, s katerim to lahko dokažete ...*

Res je. Mnoge! Toda številni menijo, da moje početje ni umetnost. A potegavščina ni le šala. Je večplastna kompleksna predstava. Zame je umetnost v glavnem laž. Je iluzija, vizija. Sem torej jaz lažnivec? Pravim, da ne. Vedno povem, da lažem. V nasprotju s politiki, korporacijami, odvjetniki. To potegavščino ločuje od prevare. Jaz vam dam vedeti, da sem vas potegnil. In zavest, da ste bili prevarani, vas sili v razmislek. Toda vrniva se k temu, kako služim denar! Pred časom sem naredil skulpturo. Kot satiro, saj me je navdihnilo dejstvo, da so vse soseske postajale skupki kondominijev. In tako sem se domislil ribjih domovanj. Naredil sem akvarij, v katerem so dnevne sobe, spalnice, kuhinje ... Nisem se mogel ustaviti. Najprej so jih predstavili v The New York Magazine, potem v reviji Life, bil sem v oddaji Good Morning America. Šlo je za šalo, a večina je sploh ni dojela. Akvariji se zdaj prodajajo za tisoče dolarjev, z njimi sem razstavljal po vsem svetu. Ljudje kar mečejo denar v ta koncept. Trenutno se dve podjetji, ki ne vesta druga za drugo, z mano pogajata o množični proizvodnji. Pišem tudi knjigo, snemam film, pomagam drugim umetnikom.

14. *Torej ne vozite taksija, kot ste nekoč izjavili?*

Ne, toda bi, če bi moral. In to je moje sporočilo. Če si kipar ali to želiš, si moraš kupiti tisti kos kamna, kladivo, dleto, potrebuješ čas. Vzame ti šest mesecev, potem skušаш izdelek prodati, toda nihče ga noče kupiti ali razstaviti. Zato odnehaš. Torej nisi umetnik! Umetnik bo že prišel do novega kamna in ga obdeloval znova in znova in znova. Kajti strast ni prodaja izdelka, strast je to, kar v izdelek vložiš.

15. *Je mali Joey vedel, kaj bo, ko bo odrasel?*

Vedel je, da hoče biti umetnik. In umetnik je bil. Dejansko sem hodil na posebno srednjo šolo za tiste, ki smo bili umetniško nadarjeni.

16. *Delovali ste in še delujete v zanimivem newyorškem okolju. S kom ste sodelovali, kdo je vplival na vaše delo?*

Če bi našteval vse, bi bil to hudo dolg odgovor. Hotel sem biti umetnik in sem zato proučeval dela drugih umetnikov, tudi mojih profesorjev. Vsi ti so vplivali name.

17. *Slišati je govorice o »umetniškem« projektu, ki je vključeval vas in Debbie Harry, pozneje pevko skupine Blondie. Nekaj časa naj bi hodila in tudi posnela zanimiv filmček ... Je to res?*

Skušam se izogibati osebnim zgodbam in ... o tem preprosto ne govorim.

18. *Prej ste dejali, da pišete knjigo. Tudi pred leti ste izjavili, da se ukvarjate z avtobiografijo. Je to ista knjiga? Kdaj bo torej končana?*

Ne vem, kdaj, če sploh. Imam namreč zanimiv problem. Kot umetnik, čigar medij so mediji, nisem lastnik svojih stvaritev. Ko se denimo pojavim na CNN – in to se je zgodilo že mnogokrat v različnih vlogah in vedno mi jih je uspelo preslepiti in osramotiti –, ti posnetki niso moja last, ampak last CNN. Če bi hotel narediti dokumentarec o svojem delu in vanj vključiti te posnetke, bi se torej obrnil na CNN pa na ABC, CBS ... in oni bi rekli: »Ne! Ponižal si nas! Zakaj bi ti dovolili uporabo teh posnetkov v filmu? Da bi ves svet lahko videl, kako neumni smo?« V knjigi želim seveda dokumentirati vse faze potegavščin: kar najprej sporočim, kaj s tem naredijo mediji in kaj se zgodi, ko razkrijem potegavščino. Če bi te članke objavil v knjigi, bi me recimo New York Times tožil. Imel sem veliko založnikov, ki so bili navdušeni nad idejo, toda niso si želeli tožb.

19. *National Enquirer se je pohvalil, da njih še niste potegnili. Vendar ste to storili v istem članku, saj so namesto vaših objavili fotografije vašega prijatelja! Vem torej, da tvegam, a vendar: se je med vašimi žrtvami kdaj znašel tudi Playboy?*

Ne. Je pa Playboy pisal o ribjih kondominijih. In – to vas bo zanimalo – Hugh Hefner ima ribji kondominij! Posebej zanj sem ga naredil. Skozi okno gleda papež, na steni spalnice visi uokvirjena Hefova fotografija. In zajčki so! Naredil sem zapeljivo zajčico z dolgimi trepalnicami, zajca na postelji, po vsej spalnici pa male zajčke v zibelkah. Je torej nekaj posebnega. In ja, seveda, na tapetah so rdeči srčki. Delo po naročilu za Hugh Hefnerja!

20. *Kaj sicer počnete? Imate kak hobi?*

Živim polno življenje, s katerim sem zadovoljen, in o ničemer ne razmišljam kot o hobiju. Rad pa potujem, to je gotovo. Zanimajo me namreč ljudje, kulture. Fizične dejavnosti pa ... Seks je v redu pa dobro vino, dobra knjiga. Ne nujno v tem vrstnem redu! **■**

Sem torej jaz lažnivec? Pravim, da ne. Vedno povem, da lažem.

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El civismo de María Zambrano

Con su esperanza en "vivir de otra manera", en la ética de la democracia, revivimos la voz de María Zambrano el año de su centenario. En un día como hoy, un catorce de abril

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Las cartas de Pla

La correspondencia entre Josep Pla y el editor Cruzet confirma, o revisa, el compromiso del escritor con su cultura

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Mercè Taberner

La fotógrafa retrató las entrañas de las viejas rotativas de "La Vanguardia", como arqueología de una labor futurista

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Berlín cero cuatro

La Bienal de Arte ha recibido críticas tremendas por el arte ¿degenerado? que presenta. Analizamos tal irritación

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LA VANGUARDIA

MIÉRCOLES, 14 DE ABRIL DE 2004

El festival The Influencers se celebró en el CCCB de Barcelona entre el 1 y el 3 de abril www.cccb.org www.d-i-n-a.net www.joeyskaggs.com

Acciones El festival "The Influencers" trajo a todo un "maestro" en desenmascarar la falta de rigor de los mass media con las noticias que difunden

Joey Skaggs, Master Prankster

MIKE IBÁÑEZ

"Me gusta la sociedad de consumo porque consumirá a todos los consumidores". Con una de sus visionarias butás, Avida Dollars dejaba sentado el sentido último del tipo de sociedad en que nos movemos: acabar consumidos a base de consumir sin sentido alguno.

A principios de abril se ha celebrado en el Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB) un encuentro de artistas y colectivos que diríamos preconizan un consumo estratégico de cultura, información, intercambio de inputs, etc., para intentar seguir poniendo en evidencia la Sociedad de Consumo. "The Influencers" es el nombre dado al encuentro, organizado por el colectivo DINA (www.d-i-n-a.net) y presentado como "festival de culture jamming, tecnologías modificadas y entretenimiento radical". Digámoslo más sencillo: el leit motiv sería cuestionar o contestar de varias formas nuestro papel en el sostenimiento -voluntario o involuntario- de la Sociedad de Consumo. El festival invitaba a cuestionar tal papel a través de las armas que justamente tal Sociedad utiliza para desactivarnos cada vez más: las tecnologías, los medios de distracción de masas...

El encuentro reunió colectivos como GuerrillaMarketing, que investigan

Skaggs encuentra su función social al fomentar el sentido crítico y el escepticismo respecto a la información con la que a veces nos atiborran

formas de cortocircuitar las estrategias del marketing al uso y dar el máximo de presencia en la esfera pública a proyectos no convencionales. Hubo música -o no-música- como la del Evolution Control Committee, proyecto de plagiarismo y reutilización en marcha desde finales de los años ochenta. También nos bendijo con su presencia el reverendo Billy y su Church for Stop Shopping, parodia patética de los predicadores americanos (aleluya), haciendo incluso "acción directa" al tal Billy en algunas tiendas de multinacionales de la cafetería (aleluya), aunque al final paradójicamente parece que haga propaganda de ellas y lo suyo tiene más bien poca función social (amén). Todo lo contrario de lo que ocurre con las acciones que desarrolla el gran Joey Skaggs (Nueva York, 1945), un verdadero Master en la cosa de cortocircuitar los mass media, poniéndolos así en evidencia.

Situaciones construidas

Joey lleva desde los años sesenta escenificando "situaciones construidas". Sería como lo de los programas de cámara oculta de la tele, perc. en lugar de lo que hacen en tales programas -sumir a un pobre diablo en una situación grotesca o humillante-, Skaggs toma como target a los propios media: agencias de prensa, periódicos, canales de TV, y los cuela esparrantados noticias totalmente falsas. Y los media (NBC, ABC, CNN, la agen-

cia UPI...), ávidos de noticias espectaculares (un burdel para perros, un profesor que inventa un curatodo a base de hormonas de cucaracha, un tipo que va de Hawaii a California en una tabla de windsurf...), han ido "picando" sin verificar apenas la veracidad de la presunta noticia y dando así patente de existencia a los "pranks", los desopilantes bromas de Skaggs, verdaderas obras maestras de sátira social.

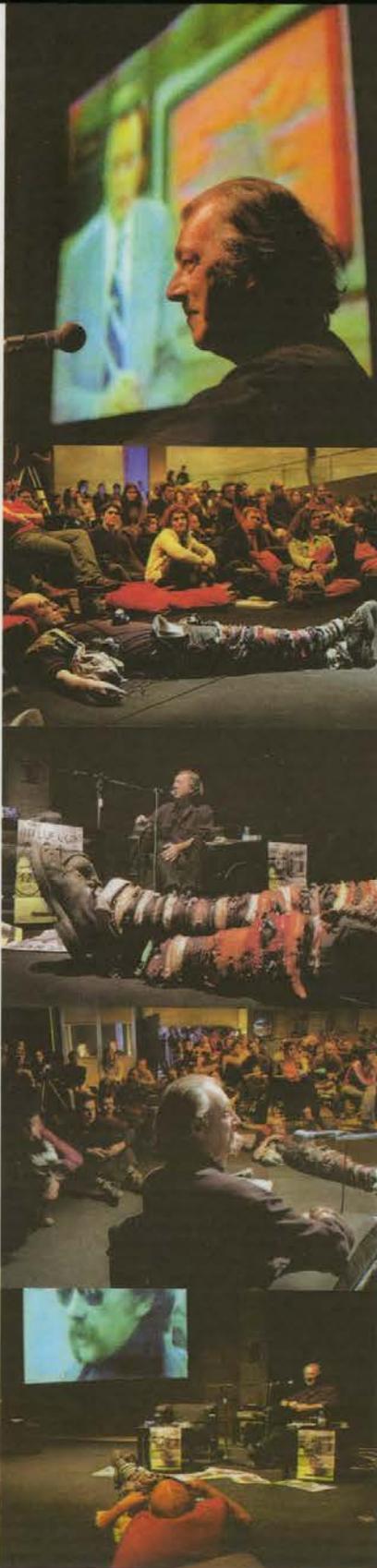
En Barcelona Joey nos brindó un video-recorrido comentado por su obra. En la web www.joeyskaggs.com hallaréis información de todas sus acciones desde el 66.

A nivel artístico sus "pranks" acaban siendo estudiadas realizaciones, "películas" sin película, con storyboard, actores, etc. y a las que cabe encontrar una práctica función social al fomentar el sentido crítico y el escepticismo del personal respecto a la información que consumimos y con la que a veces nos atiborran, o sea la credibilidad de los media y su cuestionable control de calidad (CNN y el caso Arnett, Spiegel TV y RTL Stern comprándole sus paparruchas al mentiroso Michael Born, TF1 y France 3, emitiendo entrenamientos policiales como casos verídicos, "New York Times" -Jason Blair, etc.).

Dos reflexiones Skaggs básicas: cuan-

do Joey desvela el montaje y los media descubren que les han colado un gol, que son el regador regado, o no les da la gana de reconocerlo, o no rectifican la información o, hipócritas, no permiten a Joey explicar por qué ha hecho lo que ha hecho, finalidad última de todo el montaje. Y otra: "si piensas lo que, con medios limitados e imaginación limitada, soy capaz de hacer a nivel internacional, imagina lo que gente con intenciones más siniestras, con mucho más dinero, cerebro, tiempo y otras motivaciones, están haciendo, han hecho y continuarán haciendo". El 11 de septiembre de 2001, ante la tele, me vino a la cabeza tal reflexión.

Tuvimos ocasión de llevar a Joey a la Barceloneta y hacer allí uno de nuestros legendarios vermouths psicotrónicos. Así pudimos confirmar que, además de ser un artista más comprometido que mucho "artista comprometido", Joey es muy buena gente, vital, con un gran sentido del humor y un "story-teller", un narrador de historias inigualable. Y además, generoso con vuestro humilde narrador: 1) me "scoopió", me dio un scoop: está preparando un superprank para llevarlo a cabo este próximo verano. Y 2) para engrasar la maquinaria y asegurarse un buen artículo, recibí, lo confieso, una payola: Joey me dio un señor billete de 1.000.000 de dólares, lo juro. Aunque, dándomelo quien me lo dio, a ver si va a ser falso...]



En las imágenes, diversos momentos de la presentación de Joey Skaggs el pasado 1 de abril en el CCCB

FOTOS KAVIER CERVERA

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se habla de... **joey skaggs**



Joey Skaggs: disfrazado de cura y con su triciclo-confesionario frente al Madison Square Garden durante la Convención Demócrata. «Bendígame, padre, tengo prisa», tituló el *Houston Chronicle*, uno de los muchos diarios que pidieron.

¿Quiere **tomar el pelo** a los medios de comunicación? Pregunte por **Joey Skaggs**

Joey Skaggs es un artista neoyorquino que utiliza los medios de comunicación internacional como lienzo. Según me señaló recientemente, sentado en un café de Greenwich Village, «Shakespeare decía que los locos hablan para sí mismos, los amantes hablan el uno al otro y el artista ha-

bla al mundo. ¿Hay hoy una forma mejor de dirigirse al mundo que los medios de comunicación?».

Su especialidad es la la historia falsa específicamente diseñada para atraer la atención de los medios. Una vez publicada en prensa y difundida por los telediaros, Skaggs revela sus

Años de lucha

Joey Skaggs es lo que se llama un *performer artist*. Si se dedicó a burlar a los medios de comunicación fue por el trato que éstos daban a sus actuaciones. Que eran, por ejemplo, un Belén viviente en Central Park con una Sagrada Familia vietnamita (corría 1967) y unos soldados norteamericanos que acababan con ella; o responder a las visitas organizadas de los burgueses neoyorquinos al Village (con el turístico fin de fotografiar hippies) con excursiones de hippies a los barrios ricos; o inventarse una cena de gala frente al edificio de la ONU en la que se servía esqueleto de niño pobre... Aunque se considera un amargado, sentido del humor no le falta. Se inventó que la alcaldía de Nueva York vendía el puente de Brooklyn para aliviar su déficit y le creyeron. Se inventó una clínica antiestrés en la que el doctor Schlafer (dormilón en alemán) conseguía que cualquiera soñase lo que deseaba y recibió un montón de solicitudes. Fue invitado a un programa de la NBC para explicarse, envió a un amigo suyo en su lugar y todos, presentador incluido, quedaron encantados...

verdaderas intenciones. Para su desconcerto e irritación, las *obras* de Skaggs han aparecido, a menudo en primera página, en *The New York Times*, *Die Welt*, *Il Giornale*, *Corriere della Sera*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The London Daily Mail*, por sólo nombrar unos pocos; y han sido difundidas por los más importantes de Estados Unidos.

Todo por bueno

Ya que Skaggs es casi siempre protagonista muy visible de sus historias, aunque a veces se esconde bajo seudónimos, le sigue sorprendiendo que los medios no consigan reconocerlo. Les lleva tomando el pelo con éxito desde hace ya 20 años. Ya sea el anuncio de un burdel para perros, una droga milagrosa a base de extracto de cucarachas secas, un banco de esperma para celebridades o una agencia de gorilas, *The Fat Squad*, que se ofrece para impedir que sus clientes hagan trampa en sus dietas, las historias han sido publicitadas sin el más mínimo esfuerzo por verificarlas.

SUSANNE LINGEMANN

Cuando un equipo de televisión solicitó visitar el burdel canino, Skaggs congregó rápidamente a unos amigos actores con sus mascotas, alquiló un local y escenificó varias entrevistas escandalosas. El reportaje apareció en el informativo vespertino y, al día siguiente, Skaggs fue procesado por el Gobierno por crueldad con los animales y violar el Código de Salud. Nadie comprobó si la historia era real.

«Cada vez que hago una cosa de és-

tas hay dos etapas. Primero se crea la historia y se hace el trabajo necesario para que sea conocida y publicada. Después revelo la falsedad de la historia. La segunda etapa consiste en tratar de que las publicaciones y las emisoras emitan los correspondientes desmentidos e informen de la débil línea que separa en la prensa de nuestros días los hechos de la ficción. Creo firmemente en la responsabilidad social del artista. Quiero que el público sea

más escéptico cuando se enfrente a los medios. Si yo, por mi cuenta, con recursos limitados, consigo publicar mis mentiras en periódicos respetables de todo el mundo, imagine lo que las corporaciones, las industrias científicas y el Gobierno pueden lograr.»

Dinero, dinero, dinero

Cuando se comenta que, tal vez, las muchas historias que fabrica no son las más indicadas para promover una investigación seria por

parte de los periodistas, Skaggs contrataca con la promesa de que su próxima obra, aún en estado de planificación, tendrá, sin causar perjuicio a nadie, implicaciones mucho más serias. ¿Tiene alguna duda sobre su publicación? «Ninguna. Ninguna

Con la tez oscura, un mostacho en el mejor estilo zingaro y unas alas gigantes de mariposa al dorso, Joey Skaggs inventa el movimiento gitano en los Estados Unidos.

en cualquiera de los casos. Los medios de comunicación son hoy sólo un negocio más que necesita alimentar sus páginas y sus programas con cualquier cosa que consigan. De lo que se trata, y a nadie le sorprenderá oírlo, es de hacer dinero.»

En un aspecto ligeramente más tradicional y menos controvertido, Skaggs, que divide su tiempo entre el Village neoyorquino y una casa que ha construido en la paradisíaca isla de Kauai, diseña *apartamentos* para peces..., elaboradas y funcionales cisternas de plexiglás, una obra de arte cada una de ellas, decoradas como pequeños hogares hasta en el más mínimo detalle. La colección está haciendo en estos momentos una gira por museos de los Estados Unidos.

Charlatán o campeón de la causa de la verdad, bufón o voz solitaria que intenta mostrarnos que el emperador no lleva ropa... Probablemente una combinación de todo ello. No cabe ninguna duda de que este hombre es un verdadero original.

John H. Healey





JOURNALISTEN

SVENSKA JOURNALISTFÖRBUNDETS FACKORGAN

Nr 6 13-19 februari 1987

ETT DRÅPSLAG MOT TEXTLIKA ANNONSER

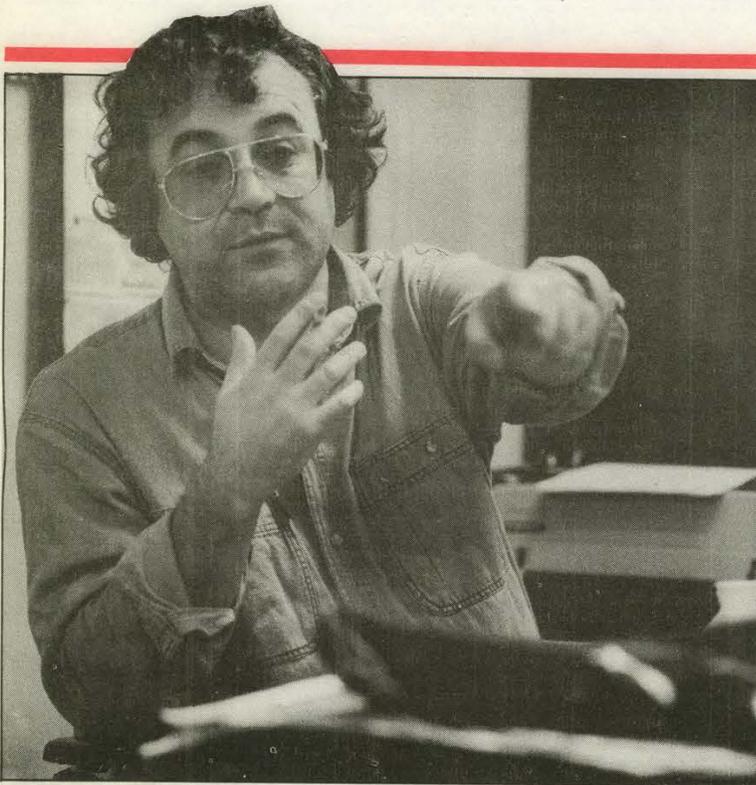
■ I måndags föll domen i Marknadsdomstolen. Vid vite av 100.000 kronor förbjöds tidningen Barometern och en av dess annonsörer att upprepa en annons som var utformad som redaktionella artiklar.

Annonsen, som handlade om skor, var en av många exempel på en ny trend inom annonsbranschen: Annonser görs ut som artiklar, för att läsarna ska tro att det är oberoende journalister som skrivit och inte kommersiella intressen.

För Journalistförbundet och alla de klubbar som slagits lokalt mot textlika annonser är Marknadsdomstolens dom en stor seger.

– Läsarna ska kunna skilja på journalistik och reklam, säger biträdande konsumentombudsmannen Axel Edling, som drivit frågan i domstolen.

Sidan 4



● Özkan Mert berättar om sitt författarskap i det nya landet.

Foto: DON TITELMAN

Den farlige poeten på Radio Stockholm

■ Özkan Mert är en välkänd poet i hemlandet Turkiet. Men hans dikter anses farliga av regimen och är delvis förbjudna. Özkan kom till Sverige 1972 och för JOURNALISTEN berättar han om sin väg in i det nya landet. Idag kombinerar han sitt författarskap med jobbet på Radio Stockholms turkiska redaktion.

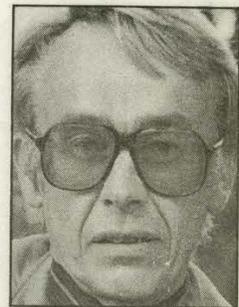
Näst Sista

– Jag är utsatt för en komplott

■ JO, Per-Erik Nilsson, har utsatts för kritik i rollen som ordförande i Pressens Pensionskassa. Kassan har förmedlat lägenheter till två av Nilssons barn.

– Det finns krafter som är ute efter mig, säger han till JOURNALISTEN.

Journalistförbundet sitter med i kassans styrelse. SJF-ordföranden Östen Johansson tycker inte att man behöver ändra reglerna för



● JO i blåsväder.

Foto: REPORTAGEBILD

lägenhetsförmedling.

Vice ordförande Yvonne Gille förutsätter att lägenhetsförmedlingen diskuteras på nästa styrelsemöte i kassan.

Sidan 5

– Angreppen mot mig ett hot mot demokratin

■ Siewert Öholms utfrågning om kärnkraften i TV-serien "Svar direkt" ledde till nio anmälningar hos Radionämnden. Anmälarna menar att programmet gynnade kärnkraftsförespråkarna.

Journalisten Jens Busch kopplar ihop Öholms sätt att leda programmet med ett löfte han gav på en debatt i en exklusiv "energiklubb" i höstas.



● Siewert Öholm i blåsväder.
Foto: SÖREN KARLSSON

– Angreppen mot mig är ett hot mot demokratin, säger Siewert Öholm till JOURNALISTEN.

Sidan 5

Joey kan lura dig när han vill – eller...?

Mitten



● Medieskojaren Joey Skaggs i några av sina många roller. I mitten ser vi honom i ett TV-inslag om dr Josef Gregor, mannen som säljer mirakelmedicin baserat på kackerlackehormon.

VARNING FÖR JOEY — HAN KAN DYKA UPP VAR SOM HELST . . .

● Har du hört talas om "Kackerlackepillret", ett undermedel baserat på kackerlackehormon, som kan bota flera sjukdomar och dessutom skydda mot radioaktiv strålning?

● Visste du att någon i USA startat en "sperma-bank" med insättningar från berömda rockstjärnor. Kunderna beställer exempelvis Mick Jagger-sperma och får rockbegåvade barn.
● "The Fat Squad" är det senaste bantningsreceptet. Du hydr en omutlig kommando från The Fat Squad som hindrar dig från att äta. Och kontraktet går inte att bryta . . .

Tre fina stories, inte sant? Fast jag hoppas att ingen av dem har stått i din tidning, för det är nämligen bluff och båg alltihop. Bakom påhittet ligger en och samma man: Joey Skaggs, 41, i Greenwich Village i New York.

Själv vill han definiera sig som i första hand konstnär, fastän han som duk använder press, radio och TV.

Med mina begränsade resurser och min begränsade fantasi har jag i tjuo års tid gång efter annan lurat hela världspressen, säger Joey Skaggs med ett belåtet garv.

Men reflektera ett tag över vad världspressen, med deras

resurser, skulle kunna slå i oss, säger han och blir allvarlig igen.

Det är aldrig långt mellan skrott och allvar hos Joey Skaggs. För en intervjuare blir det ibland förvirrande – menar karln allvar, eller är det ännu ett Skaggs-skämt?

Ingen "yuppie"

Han är ett barn av 1968, ett av de få i New Yorks Village som övervintrat, och vägrat bli "yuppie", vägrat gå vidare till högt betalda statusjobb inom bankvärlden, reklambranschen eller medierna. Nu ägnar han sig åt att lära USA:s journalistpraktikanter att tänka lite mindre på säljande nyheter och lite mer på källkritik.

Han har aldrig blivit avslöjad, vilket borde säga något om vår yrkeskår. Han har alltid själv gått ut och berättat om bluffen, till stor glädje för de tidningar som inte nappade på "nyheten" ifråga. De som föll för bluffen har oftast svårt att svälja ilskan.

— Läsarna och TV-tittarna älskar det, säger Joey Skaggs. Vem vill inte se våra pompösa mediamänniskor få byxorna nerdragna?

I Sverige?

Och om du nu tänker – som jag sa till Skaggs – att "det skulle aldrig kunna hända i Sverige", så var på din vakt. Han har faktiskt lurat såväl AP, UPI som japansk TV och flera stora europeiska tidningar. Och vem vet, kanske han kommer till Sverige . . .

På sextioalet kanske man skulle betecknat Joey Skaggs som happeningartist. Han började som målare, gick på konstskolor i New York och undervisade faktiskt i masskommunikation vid New York School of Visual Arts till för fem år sedan. Numera föreläser han vid olika journalisthögskolor över hela USA.

Målarduken blev snabbt för trång för hans politiska satir. Tillsammans med några vänner bildade han gruppen "Angry Artists Against the War in Vietnam". Julen 1968 byggde de upp en exakt kopia av en vietnamesisk by mitt i Central Park i New York, med grisar och höns och utklädda "vietnameser". En annan del av gruppen drog på sig amerikanska arméuniformer och stormade på juldagen byn och brände ner den till grunden. Det blev Joey Skaggs första arrestering, men det skulle bli flera.

Joey som Jesus

För att protestera mot kyrkans hycklande inställning gentemot de amerikanska indianerna bestämde han sig för att slå till mot den heligaste institutionen av dem alla: den katolska påskparaden i New York.

— Jag klädde ut mig till Jesus och släpade ett stort kors med ett indianhuvud på hela marschvägen, berättar Skaggs. Men när jag försökte gå in i Sankt Patrickkyrkan blev det stopp.

Han gjorde det tre år i rad –

sedan blev risken för lynchning uppenbar. Många New Yorkpolisier är ju irländare de också.

Alla Joey Skaggs upptåg, eller "conceptual performances" som han kallar dem, har udden riktad mot företeelser inom det amerikanska samhället som han anser värda att kritisera. Att medierna åker dit så det bara visslar om det ibland är en oväsentlig bieffekt, om än inte en överdriven sådan. Låt oss ta några exempel:

■ Kackerlackebluffen

Ett sjuttioal av Skaggs kompisar utgjorde gruppen "Metamorphosis" med bluffmästaren själv som vanligt i huvudrollen under namnet "Dr Josef Gregor". Den som kan sin Kafka inser att det redan i namnvalet låg varningssignaler till vakna journalister.

Dessutom hävdade "Gregor" att han var utexaminerad vid "University of Colombia, Bogota". Ett telefonsamtal hade räckt för att avslöja hela bluffen.

— Men inte en enda journalist ringde det telefonsamtalet, säger Joey Skaggs. Han låter både belåten och besviken på en gång.

Storyn gick ut på att Dr Gregor hade hittat en undermedicin. I bakgrunden fanns det välbekanta resonemanget om kackerlackans motståndskraft och färdighet i överlevnad (speciellt i New York). Skaggs "medbrottslingar", många av dem arbetslösa skådespelare eller teaterlever, utgjorde den hängivna skara som vittnade om kackerlackepillrets undergörande verkan.

Bluffen ägde rum i maj 1981, UPI körde ut den på nätet och artiklar fanns även i svenska tidningar. Att se "Dr Josef Gregor" i en stor nyhetsshow på amerikanska ABC var en upplevelse, i en vidbrättad Panamahatt med ett färgglatt band och spegelglasögon knäppte han mycket allvarligt på en kassetbandspelare med gruppens kampsång: "La Cucaracha"! Och alla köpte det.

■ Horhus för hundar
Joey Skaggs satte in en radannonser i Village Voice januari 1976.

— Get Fido fucked for fifty bucks, det var budskapet, säger han, och det märks fortfarande idag, elva år senare, att han var övermåttan förtjust över uppslaget.

— Sen fyllde vi på med detaljerna: "en läcker samling löpska tikar står till din hunds förfogande, från Fifi den franska pudeln till Lady (som i "Lady och Luften"), veterinär finns i huset, minnesfoto av akten på begäran, endast hundar – inga perversa . . ."

Gissa om massmedia nappade. Alla ville se världens första bordell för vovvar. Skaggs och hans vänner, inklusive hundar, var inte sena att uppfylla journalisternas önskemål. Man hyrde en lokal och spelade upp för TV-kamerorna. De enda som inte var införstådda med bluffen i "horhuset" var reporterna.

ABC gjorde en nyhetsdokumentär om saken som blev no-

Foto:
PELLE
ANDERSON

minerad till en Emmy (amerikansk TV:s motsvarighet till Oscar). Fortfarande har ABC inte dementerat historien.

Vad som hände 1976 var att New Yorks hundvänner rasade (de är nästan lika många som i Paris, men mer moraliska), och Joey Skaggs blev instämnd till domstol.

Datumet han skulle inställa sig råkade vara 1 april. Ett lämpligt datum att avslöja bluffen, tyckte Skaggs. Det blev inget åtal.

■ The Fat Squad

Den färskaste av Joey Skaggs bluffar är knappt ett år gammal, och trots att "The Fat Squad" liksom alla de andra upptågen är avslöjade som bluff av upphovsmannen själv så lever den vidare. Reportrar och TV-team från hela världen söker sig fortfarande till 107 Waverly Place i Greenwich Village för artiklar och TV-inslag. Storyn verkar för bra för att dö.

En före detta Mr America ringde och ville köpa franchisingrätten till hela USA, berättar Joey Skaggs. Alla älskade den här bluffen.

Egentligen var den en ganska vass kritik mot vikthysterin i USA, där den vanligaste repliken vid middagsbordet är "Thanks, but I'm on a diet".

Washington Post gick på bluffen, Philadelphia Inquirer liksom, New York Post, ABC:s Good Morning America, franska TF 1 m fl.

"Joe Bones" var Joey Skaggs alias som mannen bakom "The Fat Squad". För 300 dollar om

dagen (minimum tre dagar) kunde man hyra en bastant vakt (spelade av Skaggs mest grovhuggna kompisar) som helt enkelt hindrade klienten att äta.

– Vissa av våra klienter har försökt gömma chokladkakor i badrummet, sa "Joe Bones" i en intervju. Sämt genomskådar vi direkt.

"Vi drar oss inte för att använda våld" och "våra kontrakt går inte att annullera när de väl är undertecknade" var andra uttalanden.

En annan av Skaggs polare – en kvinna – intygade inför journalistikåren att hon hade "The Fat Squad" att tacka för flera tappade kilon.

Nästa dag lät Joey Skaggs bubblan brista – det var många reportrar som fick äta upp sina ord.

■ OK, du lurar massmedierna, men vad gör du med alla andra; vanliga, hyggliga medborgare som kanske verkligen behöver en universalmedicin eller tycker att hunden ser lite ledsen ut, eller vill banta?

– Det har aldrig varit något problem, säger Joey Skaggs. Vi är beredda på detta, och när telefonerna börjar ringa har vi ett batteri motfrågor som i praktiken gör det omöjligt för någon att utnyttja den påstådda service vi erbjuder. Vi lurar inte vanligt folk, syftet är ett helt annat.

– Förhoppningsvis har vi istället öppnat ögonen på en del för hur de riskerar att bli manipulerade av massmedia, och av

dem som utnyttjar massmedier till desinformation.

■ Tjänar du några pengar på det här?

– Tvärtom, förklarar Joey. De flesta av "skämten" har kostat en hel del pengar: hyra av lokaler; porto och telefon; kläder och rekvisita osv. Men varje konstform kostar pengar för en seriös artist. Marmor är också dyrt!

– Att jag inte har några som helst kommersiella intressen eller andra bindningar är en förutsättning för att genomföra den här sortens bluffar. Utan integritet skulle det aldrig gå.

■ Hur överlever du då?

– Jag är ju målare och skulptör också, säger Joey Skaggs. Och så har jag ju mina bostadsrätter för guppies i karriären!

■ Va??

Skaggs banar sig längst in i källarvåningen, belamrad med videoband och pappershögar, skrivmaskin, TV, bandspelare och diverse pryglar från olika bluffar. På väggen sitter en rad porträtt på medlemmarna i "The Fat Squad".

Han visar mig några fantastiska akvarier, i själva verket skalenliga kopior av typiska New York-våningar, byggda av material som tål vatten och flynda med glada fiskar.

– De här säljer jag för mellan 2 500 och 4 000 dollar styck, säger han.

– De blev en stor hit för några år sedan, berättar han och tar fram en bunt pressklipp. Alla stora, lyxiga heminredningsmagasin i såväl USA som

Europa och Japan verkar ha skrivit om dem.

Hugh Hefner specialbeställde ett av mig, fyllt med bunnies och med påven kikande genom ett nyckelhål . . .

Livet som akvarium

Den politiska satiren i hans bostadsrätter för fiskar är kanske inte så enkel att se, men termen "upwardly mobile guppies" har sin motsvarighet i "upwardly mobile yuppies". Det kan vara Skaggs kommentar till New York-livets fåfänga framgångsdrömmar: Det är ändå bara ett akvarium.

■ Vad är det som skiljer dig från en "vanlig" konstnär?

– När du målar är du ensam med duken, du kan hela tiden säga "stopp", säger Joey Skaggs. I en "performance" av min typ har du ingen kontroll över utvecklingen, det liknar mest av allt att surfa. Dessutom är det en kollektiv konst, och mer spännande eftersom man aldrig på förhand vet om man kommer att lyckas.

Surfa, ja. Skaggs har en bostad på Hawaii också. Och hör du talas om mannen som vind-surfade från Hawaii till Californien, i 40 dygn, så är det bara ännu en av hans bluffar. 1983 var det "historiska" nyheter i såväl TV som tidningar.

– Jag har alltid en formulerad målsättning med det jag gör, påpekar Joey Skaggs. Manuskrivet är skrivet, regi och rollbesättning – precis som en vanlig show. Allt jag gör dokumenterar jag, alla TV-inslag har

jag på video, alla radioinslag bandade, pressklipp från alla amerikanska tidningar, alla telefonsamtal bandas och alla brev sparas.

Betyg: underkänt

Joey Skaggs har nytta av sitt arkiv när han åker runt och föreläser. Stora, runda ögon möter honom vart han kommer. "Får man verkligen göra så här" är den vanliga reaktionen.

– Men en del frågar sig också hur jag kunnat hålla på i tjugo års tid, när mitt ansikte avbildats i tidningar utan förklädning ett otal gånger, när jag varit i samtliga stora TV-kanaler massor av gånger – och ändå går garvade journalister på det varje gång. Det är inget gott betyg åt branschen, och många journalisthögskolelever förstår det inte.

Den idealiserade bilden från "Stoppa pressarna" och "Alla presidentens män" får sig en törn när de får höra sänt.

Blodigt finger

Skaggs drar på sig de svarta cowboybooten och den svarta läderjackan och föreslår en fika på coffeeshopen runt hörnet. Väl där drar han upp ett blodigt gummifinger ur fickan och smuglar upp det på salladsdisken. Förjust, nästan andlöst, inväntar han reaktionerna. Han har ett smittande skratt, skämtaren Joey Skaggs. Fast en del av de journalister han mött genom åren skulle nog inte skratta med.

PELLE ANDERSON

Han bringer dig lige lukt ...

... i dine sex-drømmes himmerige

Denne mand er direktør for New York-firmaet »Sexonix«. Hans nyeste opfindelse har fået stor mediedækning: Verdens første computerstyrede virtual reality sex-maskine. Han hedder Joey Skaggs og er fuld af løgn. Verdenspressen hopper igen og igen på hans fupnumre. **Side 4-5**

ESKADRE KØBENHAVN

Essens

Det er snart mange årtier siden, at avisens referat af generalforsamlingen i hønsævlerforeningen startede med at fortælle, hvem der blev valgt til dirigent, og sluttede med at lade selvsamme dirigent takke forsamlingen for god ro og orden. Den journalist, der på redaktionen i dag afleverer et kronologisk referat, vil med rette blive beskyldt for åndelig dovenskab. Og hans produkt vil blive forsynet med prædikatet »journalistisk«.

Forlængst er det blevet en integreret del af en journalists arbejde at forkorte, sammentrække, forklare, tilføje, udelade, vinkle og fordøje for i sidste ende at have held til at formidle en essens, et koncentrat af virkeligheden. Den slags er anerkendt – hvis det er tekst og ikke fotos, det handler om.

Hvorfor egentlig denne skelnen mellem tekst og foto? Sådan spørger billedhistorikeren Axel Bolvig andetsteds i dette blad. Hvorfor ikke benytte sig af, at teknikken nu tillader på mest tilforladelige vis, at man, og så når det gælder fotos, sammentrækker, tilføjer eller udelader? For at få essensen frem, i sandhedens tjeneste og loyalt over for virkeligheden?

Svaret giver Bolvig selv:

Pressefotografiet opfattes som dokumentarisk registrerende på en helt anden måde, end tekst gør det.

Så hvis en redaktionssekretær eksempelvis på Ekstra Bladet er utilfreds med et fotos journalistiske indhold, er det en ny fotograf, hun skal have fat i, næste gang det brænder på – og ikke den ny teknik.

Skønt billedhistorikerens provokerende konklusioner om sandhedssøgende foto-manipulationer selvfølgelig bør afvises, kan hans argumentation godt bruges. Om ikke andet så til at skærpe opmærksomheden om den dokumentariske værdi af andre journalistiske virkemidler.

Tænk for eksempel på mediernes ublu brug af arkivfotos. Hvis fotos af begivenheder sættes ind i andre sammenhænge end de oprindelige, er de fleste flinke til at skrive »(arkivfoto)« under. Men når kendte ansigter fiskes op af arkivkuverterne, er der stadig frit slag til hvad som helst.

Spørg bare dronningen eller Arne Melchior.

Eller se billederne af Tøger Seidenfaden og Hans Otto på side 6-7 i dette blad. *mith*

6 **Fredet.** Træt efter 18 dages usynlig konflikt på TV Syd bøjede TV 2-direktøren sig og frede Metals bastion.

7 **§-kamp om PF-prislisterne.** Arbejdsgivere påstår, at freelance-PF'ere danner ulovligt monopol, når de har en minimumsprisliste.

TV taktik

10 **Krisehjælp** til folk, der skal i TV-interview. 23.000 kr. for nødudrykning og 2 timers træning lige før ofret skal på skærmen.

12 **Snydefotos kan være mere sande.** Det bør være fotograferne selv, der manipulerer sig frem til sande motiver, mener billed-historiker.

16 **Om natten skriver han i hånden.** Så vækker Mustafa ikke hele familien i kahytten på »Flotel Europa«, når han skriver sin avis for flygtninge i Danmark.

18 **Statligt sex-salg.** Folk bestilte børneporno, der lå som bevismateriale i en retssag. Nu er det bizarre hul i stor svensk åbenhed lukket.



19 **Nis Petersen.** »drukmås, døgenigt, løgnhals – revolver-journalist«, fnøs de gamle i faget om myten, da Gert Smistrup var journalist-elev.

20 **Råt mix** af nyheder, sensationer, satire og sladder har skabt »Rumæniens frække oplags-vidunder«.

27 **Kommunikationsfolkene** er forbundets tavse mindretal i journalistikkens vækstområde. Men nu skal de være synlige, lover DJ-formanden i sin faglige kommentar.



28 **Selvrensens sejr** over samvittigheden. Unionsmodstander skrifter: Hun fortryder, at hun ikke lagde navn til en annonce i egen avis om at stemme nej.

M e d i e

Af Nils Ulrik Pedersen

□ Brugeren trækker en elektronisk hætte ned over ansigtet, anbringer sensorer rundt om på kroppen, indtaster sin fantasi i en computer og flyder ind i et seksuelt himmerige, hvor alt er muligt og tilfredsstillende er total. Det er verdens første *virtual reality* sexmaskine, der her er tale om. Firmaet bag hedder *Sexonix* og ligger i New York. Kunderne? Ensomme businessmænd på forretningsrejse, handicappede med begrænsede seksuelle muligheder – plus de andre cirka 5,5 milliarder sexfrustrerede beboere på vores lille planet. *Sexonix* er et produkt med ubegrænsede muligheder, forudsiger skaberen, dr. phil. Joey Skaggs.

Nu er der imidlertid et problem. *Sexonix*' stand på den årlige julegavemesse i Toronto er tom. Under toldeftersynet på den amerikansk-canadiske grænse er *Sexonix*-maskinen blevet beslaglagt af de canadiske myndigheder. Utålmodige messe-gæster, inklusive en lille flok journalister, der er blevet varskoet via pressemeddelelser, venter forgæves ved den tomme stand.

Torontos CHUM FM radio er en af dem, der tager historien op i et interview med *Sexonix*' repræsentant i Canada, en ung, rap kvinde ved navn Marian Pierce. Radiens morgenteam går bagover i begejstring og udvider indslaget med en voxpop på byens gader med spørgsmålet: Hvad mener De om *virtual reality sex*?

Få uger senere følger Torontos største tv-station, City TV, op med et indslag om *Sexonix*, som led i en serie om sex i '90erne. TV-stationen bringer klip fra en promotionvideo, produceret af *Sexonix*. I programmet indgår også brudstykker af et telefoninterview med Joey Skaggs fra New York.

Opmuntret af succesen i radio og tv optræder *Sexonix* sine bestræbelser på at få kontakt med de trykte medier. Medens dette læses, er historien om *Sexonix* på vej ud til en snes amerikanske computerblade, som Skaggs har kontaktet via pressemeddelelser og breve til redaktionerne. Skaggs forudsiger, at flere af bladene vil tage historien op.

Det ville der ikke være noget mærkeligt i, hvis det ikke var fordi historien er løgn, fra ende til anden.

Driver gæk med pressen

Der findes ikke nogen vidundersexmaskine. Der findes ikke noget firma, der hedder *Sexonix*. De canadiske myndigheder har ikke beslaglagt

f u p p

Joey Skaggs: En-mands guerillahær i krig mod medierne. Har viet sit liv til at snyde ukritiske og godtroende journalister.



produktet. Marian Pierce er ikke repræsentant for *Sexonix*, men en skuespillerinde hyret til at spille rollen. og Joey Skaggs er lige så lidt *Sexonix*-direktør, som han er dr. phil.

Derimod er han USA's førende mediefupper. Han har viet sit liv til at snyde ukritiske og godtroende journalister. I over 25 år har han drevet gæk med pressen og i sag efter sag vist, hvor nemt det er at få den til at sluge en 'and'. Han har studeret journalisters arbejdsmetode og tankegang og har raffineret sin teknik, så han er i stand til at 'plante' sager i medierne og få bred amerikansk, og nogle gange også international, dækning af dem.

Skaggs begår aldrig ulovligheder, begrænser sig til uskadelige og ofte grinagtige emner og slutter altid med at afsløre snyderierne med det fromme håb, at pressefolk vil forstå moralen og se sig bedre for næste gang.

Bla. Torontos største TV-station bed på: I en seriens serie om sex i '90erne blev bragt klip fra Skaggs' fup-promotion-video om »sexmaskinen«.

Performance-kunst mod Vietnamkrigen

Det var Vietnamkrigen og amerikanske mediers dækning af den i de første år, der gjorde Skaggs mediekritisk og lagde spiren til, hvad der siden gjorde ham til en én-mands guerillahær i kamp mod medierne.

Midt i 1960'erne fungerede amerikanske aviser og tv stadig som en propaganda-central for præsident Johnsons antikommunistiske korstog i Sydøstasien. Skaggs hadede krigen lige så meget som millioner af andre

unge amerikanere. Han læste billedkunst på en kunsthøjskole i New York, men begyndte nu at se kunst i en bredere sammenhæng. Hans første store stykke performance-kunst var byggeriet af en vietnamesisk landsby i en park i New York. Skaggs og hans hjælpere brændte landsbyen af for vise, hvordan de amerikanske soldater opførte sig i Vietnam.

Skaggs udvidede sit repertoire. Han gik med et kors på ryggen gennem New Yorks gader som en moderne lidende Jesus for at protestere mod social uretfærdighed og hykleri i Amerika. Han anbragte en kæmpe brystholder på en bygning i Wall Street i protest mod sexismen i medierne. Og arrangerede en hippiebustur til Queens i protest mod, at medierne gjorde hippierne i New York til turistobjekt for forstadsbefolkningen. Han var pioner for folk som yipielederen Abbie Hoffman og ven med Yoko Ono, en

anden af performancekunstnerne i 1960'ernes New York.

Hundebordellet

Men det var først nogle år senere, at Skaggs' aktioner fandt den form, som var den mest effektive. Nemlig at opfinde en historie, få journalister til at hoppe på limpinden og bruge sagen til at afsløre pressen som ukritisk og nem at manipulere.

I 1976 indrykkede Skaggs en annonce i en ugeavis, hvor han avtererede et bordel for hunde med »et udsøgt udvalg af hotte tæver lige fra stamtavlehunde (Fifi den franske puddel) til bastarder (Lady vagabonden). Dyrslægt til stede. Ingen perverse personer, tak. Kun for hunde. Ring for aftale...«

Da de første journalister begyndte at ringe, riggede Skaggs et lokale op med nogle hunde og en flok venner, der spillede rollerne som hundejere på bordelbesøg med lille vaps. Journalisterne hoppe-



SUSANNE FROCHOLLA



SUSANNE FROCHOLLA



SUSANNE FROCHOLLA

Gennem 25 år har Joey Skaggs drevet gæk i skiftende roller og skaffet sig adgang til godtroende medier. B.l.a. fik han international dækning som leder af »Fat Squad« (Fedepatruljen): En gruppe muskelmænd, der dognet rundt og for penge ville forhindre overvægtige i at spise for meget.



de i med begge ben og historien fik international dækning. WABC TV i New York blev ovenikøbet nomineret til en Emmy-pris for et indslag, der tog hundebordellet alvorligt. Skaggs afslørede historien som fup, da han – den 1. april! – efter en stævning for dyremishandling ledsaget af en hærskar af pressefolk mødte op hos New Yorks offentlige anklager.

Mør til en ny Mick Jagger

Senere samme år var Skaggs på færde igen, nu som Giuseppe Scaggoli, indehaver af en sædbank, hvis sæd var tappet fra berømte rockstjerner. Skaggs/Scaggoli oplyste i pressemeddelelser, at sæden ville blive solgt ved offentlig auktion. På den fastsatte dag strømmede unge kvinder (i virkeligheden hyrede skuespillerinder) til auktionslokalet i håb om at blive mødre til en ny Mick Jagger eller Bob Dylan. Scaggoli aflyste derefter auktionen med en erklæring om, at sæden var blevet stjålet.

Efter disse to kanonsuccesser holdt Skaggs lav profil et par år, før han igen erobrede forsider med nye fupperi-

● **Fedepatruljen (1986):** Joe Bones (Skaggs) står frem som leder af en gruppe muskelmænd, der for god betaling vil overvåge overvægtige mennesker dognet rundt og sørge for, at de ikke spiser for meget. Kaloriestrømerne bliver et mediehit fra Washington Post over Newsweek til tyske og japanske aviser.

● **'Anden' (1987):** Det er historien, der bogstaveligt talt er en and. Dr. Dick Long (Skaggs) står frem og advarer mod, at den såkaldte »geoduck«, et muslingedyr på Stillehavskysten, er ved at blive udryddet på grund af japanske opkøb. Japanerne tror, det er sexstimulerende at spise den. Historien ryger ud over UPI og det meste af den amerikanske presse. Dyret ligner en kæmpepenis – et faktum, som der også hentydes til med den gode doktors navn.

Indiansk Skalpedoktor

● **Hår i dag (1990):** Dr. Joseph Chenango (Skaggs) eftersøger donorer, der vil te-

stamentere deres skalpe til skaldede mænd. »Tjen op til 1000 dollars nu. Kontanter nu, donér senere ... Den mest permanente metode mod skaldethed...» Chenango poserer på pressebilleder med hårbånd og et billede af en af hans indianske forfædre i baggrunden! I pressepakken er der også nogle afsindigt grinagtige før- og efterbilleder af tyndhårede mænd, der er blevet hjulpet (med parykker). Igen bliver historien en massemedie-succes.

● **Mobil bekendelse (1992):** Skaggs får bygget en bekendelsesbod i mahogni magen til dem, man ser i katolske kirker, får den placeret på en specialbygget trehjulet cykel og begiver sig i katolsk pastordragt til det demokratiske partikonvent i New York i juli 1992, hvor der er forsamlet 10.000 politikere og delegerede og dobbelt så mange pressefolk. Skaggs siger, at han er der for at give de onde politikere chancen for at bekende deres synder. Lokale feministe putter klistermærker på bekendelsesboden i protest mod kirkens sexistiske holdninger. Politbetjente undskylder over for pastoren, mens de hjælper med til at pille klistermærkerne af. Historien om »Portofess« ryger via AP, Reuters og CNN ud til det meste af verden.

Giver medierne hvad de be'r om

Skaggs metode har vist sin effektivitet i over et halvt hundrede fupnumre med medierne. Første skridt er at få medierne på krogen. Det vigtigste her er at præsentere en idé, et koncept, som fanger interessen. Et element af sex er noget, Skaggs bruger ofte, fordi det virker hver gang. Ofte virker de historier, Skaggs finder på, så tiltrækkende på journalister, at de bogstaveligt talt står i kø for at få dem.

»Det er ganske enkelt. Jeg giver medierne, hvad de forlanger. Sex, sensationer, vovte ting ... Og de køber det,« siger Skaggs.

Hvordan lancerer han historierne, så de virker overbevisende?

»Detaljer, detaljer, detaljer,« siger Skaggs. Detaljerne skal være i orden for at historien kan overbevise om, at den er go' nok.



»Det er ikke så let, som det lyder. Journalister laver faktisk noget research,« siger Skaggs.

Det hjælper på troværdigheden, når han påtager sig eksperttitler, f.eks. som dr. phil. i Sexonix-historien. Det hjælper i særdeleshed, når han kan henvise til, at andre medier har taget en af hans sager op.

»På det tidspunkt drømmer medierne ikke engang om at stille spørgsmål ved, om det er sandt, hvad jeg siger. De tager det for givet, fordi de har set det på tv eller læst det,« siger Skaggs.

Hvis journalister brugte deres hoveder...

Han gør tit historierne så overdrevne og giver andre antydninger af fup, at det burde være indlysende, at der er noget galt med dem. Men journalister overser selv de mest oplagte fingerpeg.

»Hvis journalister brugte deres hoveder og den kritiske

Joey Skaggs sat op som dr. phil. og direktør for Sexonix: Firmaet, der har udviklet verdens første virtual reality computerstyrede sexmaskine. Fænomenet er mediefupperens seneste and – og den ædes rå af både radio, TV og trykte medier.

sans pressen praler så meget af, så var jeg hurtigt »out of business,« siger Skaggs.

Den 47-årige Skaggs tjener, bortset fra et foredrags-honorar i ny og næ ikke noget på sine medieaktiviteter, men opretholder tilværelsen ved kunstmaleri. Måske ikke overraskende er motiverne i hans billeder himmel og hav, naturens elementer i skøn harmoni, som om han her dyrker en anden side af sig selv, fjernt fra de provokationer og konfrontationer, der præger hans medieliv.

Han bor i en kælderlejlighed i det nedre Manhattan. Den er fuld af rekvisitter fra fupnumrene. Stuen domineres af den katolske bekendelsesbod fra sidste sommers raid mod det demokratiske partikonvent. Skaggs trækker en tommyetk mappe med dokumentation af hans 25-årige karriere som mediefupper frem og putter videobånd i maskinen, som opruller hans bedrifter på tv.

Det er en hård branche at føre krig mod verdens magtigste mediekonglomerater, og det er småt med anerkendelse for indsatsen. Men hvis en fattig kunstner i en kælderlejlighed kan føre USA's største og mest velrenommerede aviser og tv-selskaber bag lyset, hvad kan politikere, organisationer og virksomheder med PR-firmaer og uanede ressourcer i ryggen ikke drive det til, når det drejer sig om at forføre, fordreje, manipulere, styre og kontrollere medierne?



EXCLUSIVO
Larry Ellison, da Oracle,
o segundo homem mais rico
do mundo, fala a VEJA

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O HOMEM MAU DA INTERNET

O inimigo histórico de
Bill Gates diz que apenas
uma em cada mil empresas
virtuais vai sobreviver

Cuidado com ESSE SUJEITO

O americano Joey Skaggs inventa absurdos que a imprensa e a TV engolem como verdadeiros

João Gabriel de Lima

Em 1995, Baba Wa Simba desembarcou em Londres com fama de terapeuta revolucionário. Nascido no Quênia, filho de missionários americanos, inventara um método para desenvolver o “lado animal” de homens e mulheres. A terapia consistia em ficar de quatro e urrar, para liberar instintos reprimidos. Baba Wa Simba resolveu demonstrá-la em sua turnê londrina. Na frente de uma chusma de jornalistas, exortou os voluntários a emitirem “graaaauurrrrs”. “Graaaaaauuuuuurrrrr, graaaaaauuuuuurrrr”, responderam os leões de araque, todos de quatro no chão. Para tornar tudo mais realista, atirou ao bando pedaços de carne crua e, em seguida, os convidou a tirar uma soneca reparadora nos moldes da savana africana — amontoados uns sobre os outros. A sessão foi mostrada em vários noticiários da TV inglesa. Dias depois, veio a bomba. Baba Wa Simba era um impostor e alguns de seus seguidores não passavam de atores contratados. O terapeuta era, na verdade, o artista plástico americano Joey Skaggs, famoso nos Estados Unidos pelas peças que prega em programas de TV e jornais. “Assim como os pintores usam telas, eu uso a imprensa como suporte para a minha arte”, teoriza, em tom zombeteiro, em seu site na internet. Em sua página eletrônica, é possível encontrar também uma contabilidade dos veículos que já foram enganados por ele. Na lista aparece até a Rede Globo, que teria caído na farsa Baba Wa Simba, ao exibí-la no telejornal *Bom Dia Brasil*. A Globo não confirma nem desmente ter caído na esparrela.

Skaggs, hoje com 53 anos, estudou artes plásticas nos anos 60 e começou como a maioria dos artistas performáticos de seu tempo de juventude: protestando. Participou de eventos contra a Guerra do Vietnã e contra a fome no mundo. No final da década de 70 apurou seu foco. Elegeu um alvo — a mídia — e adotou um estilo — a sátira. Um de seus primeiros trabalhos foi a organização de uma passeata de falsos ciganos. Eles protestavam contra o fato de o inseto responsável por uma praga agrícola ter recebido o nome de “mosquito cigano”. Em 1986, inventou que havia uma empresa chamada “Fat Squad”, ou “Brigada dos Gordos”, cujo serviço básico era enviar parrudões à casa de pessoas que estivessem burlando regimes alimentares. Os integrantes do esquadrão evitariam, usando a força se preciso, que os clientes atacassem a geladeira. Saíram reportagens sobre o assunto nas TVs americana, inglesa, francesa e italiana. Em 1992, desfilou pelas ruas de Nova York disfarçado de padre, pedalando um tri-



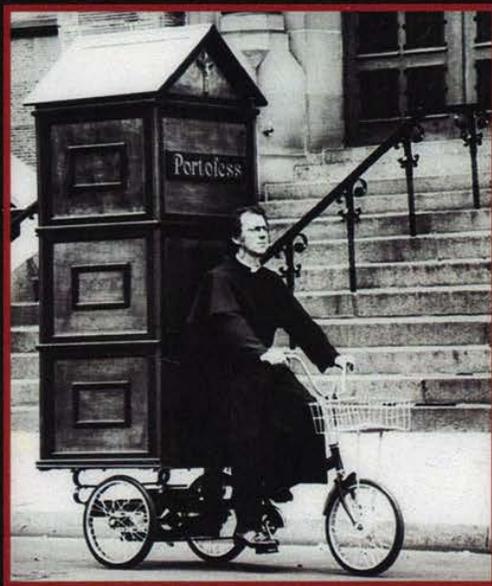
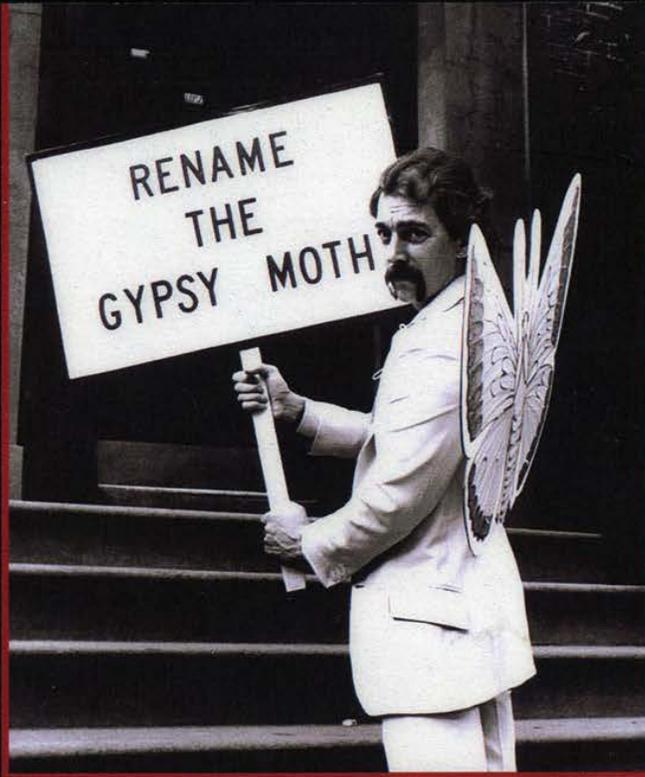
▲ SOPA DE CACHORRO

Em 1994, Skaggs enviou a um canil uma carta de um falso empresário coreano propondo sociedade. Ele pagaria 10 centavos de dólar por animal, com a finalidade de fazer sopa. O caso virou notícia

▼ BABA WA SIMBA

O artista aportou em Londres em 1995, na pele de um terapeuta africano. Seu método consistia em fazer as pessoas urrar como leões e comer carne crua. Alguns voluntários ficaram de quatro





▲ CIGANOS CONTRA O ESTEREÓTIPO

Em 1982, Skaggs desfilou pelas ruas de Nova York disfarçado de líder cigano. Protestava contra o fato de um mosquito ter recebido o nome da etnia

◀ CONFESSIONÁRIO AMBULANTE

Vestido como padre, Skaggs foi até onde os pecadores estavam: a convenção do Partido Democrata. Todo mundo achou que era mesmo um religioso

ciclo acoplado a um confessionário. A intenção era ir até onde os pecadores estavam: a convenção do Partido Democrata. Lá, recebeu vasta cobertura da imprensa. Todos achavam que se tratava mesmo de um religioso.

As brincadeiras de Skaggs são tão absurdas que é difícil imaginar que alguém possa ser enganado. Ele próprio embute em suas "hoaxes" — palavra

que usa para definir sua atividade e que em inglês se refere a uma peça que alguém prega — várias pistas de que tudo não passa de piada. O nome do dono da empresa Fat Squad, aquela dos gordos, se chamava Joe Bones, ou Joãozinho Ossos. Interpretando um médico que prometia a cura da calvície mediante transplante de escalpo, ele deu entrevistas dizendo ser descendente

de uma tribo de peles-vermelhas. "Os jornais e os programas de TV gostam de mostrar coisas absurdas, e não se importam em checar a veracidade. Eu apenas dou o que eles querem", disse Skaggs a VEJA, por telefone. Não é só isso. Suas mentiras são também cuidadosamente planejadas, como aquela que aproveitou a polêmica em torno da credibilidade dos jurados do caso O.J. Simpson — o "Projeto Salomão", um programa de computador que seria capaz de substituir um júri de carne e osso. Para perpetrá-la, ele pediu emprestado a um amigo um escritório de informática e contratou atores para posar de cientistas co-responsáveis pela empreitada. Ele próprio, na pele do falso Ph.D. Joseph Bonuso (seu sobrenome por parte de mãe), deu entrevista à rede CNN sobre o assunto. Ao fundo, monitores mostravam o retrato de O.J.

Simpson. A emissora repercutiu a notícia com juristas. Mais tarde, foi obrigada a se retratar. A peça data de 1995.

Skaggs planeja aportar no Brasil no próximo dia 25 para uma série de palestras em universidades. Ele vive disso e de dar aulas, já que a "arte" que cultiva não é vendável em galerias. Já foi processado algumas vezes. A imprensa, obviamente, o odeia — e ele não pára de dar motivos para tanto. Quando é convidado para entrevistas na televisão, freqüentemente manda amigos em seu lugar — que, é claro, fingem ser ele. Faz o mesmo quando é chamado a posar para fotos. Com Skaggs, todo cuidado é pouco. Em 1994, o jornal *The New York Times* resolveu publicar um perfil seu, por ocasião de uma "hoax" em que ele forjou a existência de uma empresa coreana que comprava cães para fazer sopa. O artista posou com uma máscara de cachorro. O repórter, para não se comprometer, escreveu a legenda: "Um homem que garante ser Joey Skaggs". É fácil enganar jornalistas? "Eles caem porque a realidade costuma ser mais absurda do que as mentiras que eu invento", disse a VEJA por telefone. Disse mesmo? Quem garante que era ele? Melhor desconfiar. Nesta reportagem, a frase "disse Skaggs" deve ser substituída por "declarou um homem que garante ser Joey Skaggs". É mais seguro. ■

ELEIÇÕES
A CAIXA-PRETA DO PT
O PAÍS GAÚCHO

Editora ABRIL - edição 1.674
ano 33 - nº 45 - R\$ 4,50
8 de novembro de 2000

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ELAS VENCERAM

- ◆ No Brasil já há mais mulheres médicas e advogadas do que homens
- ◆ Elas ficam com a maioria dos novos empregos do país
- ◆ Ganharam a prefeitura em seis capitais brasileiras
- ◆ O salário delas cresce num ritmo mais rápido que o dos homens
- ◆ Uma delas acaba de ser indicada para o Supremo Tribunal

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Humor felino

O repórter e gato que já rugiu como um leãozinho

Alto, alourado, com olhos claros que penetram o coração das moças do Baixo Gávea, onde costuma protagonizar saraus poéticos, o carioca Pedro Bial é repórter e gato. O que todo mundo esqueceu é que, em um longínquo dia de 1995, Bial foi também leãozinho. Correspondente da Rede Globo em Londres, ele caiu na esparrela montada pelo americano Joey Skaggs, um especialista em enganar a imprensa. Naquele ano, Skaggs chegou à capital da Inglaterra usando o nome falso de Baba Wa Simba e dizendo-se inventor de uma técnica terapêutica que liberava a porção selvagem dos pacientes. O método consistia em deixar as pessoas de quatro no chão e estimulá-las a urrar como um felinão das savanas africanas enquanto disputavam pedaços de carne crua. Assim como muitos jornalistas, Bial se interessou pela história e resolveu gravar uma reportagem. As cenas que foram ao ar são uma piada. “Ele descobriu que, rugindo, recuperamos o nosso orgulho. Em contato com nosso lado animal nos tornamos seres humanos melhores”, anunciou Bial com a pompa habitual, para logo em seguida experimentar a “terapia”. De quatro, ele rugiu, berra e mexe a cabeça para os lados, como uma fera feroz. Ao final, declara: “Foi mais fácil do que eu pensava. É só lembrar das contas a pagar e soltar o berro. Traz uma sensação de alívio ao corpo e à cabeça, mas a garganta sofre”. Só recentemente a Globo tomou conhecimento de que uma de suas estrelas havia caído numa armadilha. ■

Marcelo Camacho



Pedro Bial: ele caiu, de quatro, numa esparrela

S.M.



O Rappa: por que eles abririam o show de americanos sem expressão?

Música

Rebelião in Rio

Bandas brasileiras reclamam de discriminação e abandonam o megafestival de rock

Apresentada como um megaespétaculo, a terceira versão do Rock in Rio acaba de sofrer sua primeira grande baixa. Na semana passada, seis das principais bandas brasileiras — Raimundos, Charlie Brown Jr., Cidade Negra, O Rappa, Skank e Jota Quest — abandonaram oficialmente o festival. O pivô da rebelião foi a exclusão de O Rappa. Até então, os grupos brasileiros haviam aceitado todas as normas impostas pela produção. Iriam tocar por um cachê simbólico e cederiam músicas e imagens para o disco e o DVD do festival. Foi quando O Rappa soube que se apresentaria ainda de dia, abrindo o show de um punhado de americanos. O grupo recla-

mou e foi limado do evento. As outras cinco bandas saíram em solidariedade.

Foi uma decisão corajosa — e acertada. No primeiro Rock in Rio, em 1985, era justificável que os brasileiros antecedessem as atrações internacionais, já que vendiam muito menos discos do que elas. Hoje, esse quadro se inverteu: a música brasileira é responsável por 75% do mercado fonográfico nacional. Só os novos lançamentos dos amotinados do Rock in Rio vendem quase o dobro dos principais convidados do festival. Não é o único fator em questão. O evento de 2001 tem músicos de qualidade, como o cantor canadense Neil Young e o grupo americano R.E.M. Boa parte

de seu elenco internacional, contudo, é composta de grupos insignificantes ou em final de carreira, como Guns N'Roses. Exigir que um artista nacional de renome abra o show de estrangeiros sem expressão é malandragem dos organizadores. A revanche pode estar a caminho: já há empresários pensando em reunir os renegados do Rock in Rio num festival paralelo. ■

Nacionais x estrangeiros

Os números dos convidados do Rock in Rio

Discos vendidos pelos artistas nacionais

2,5 milhões de cópias

Cachê médio

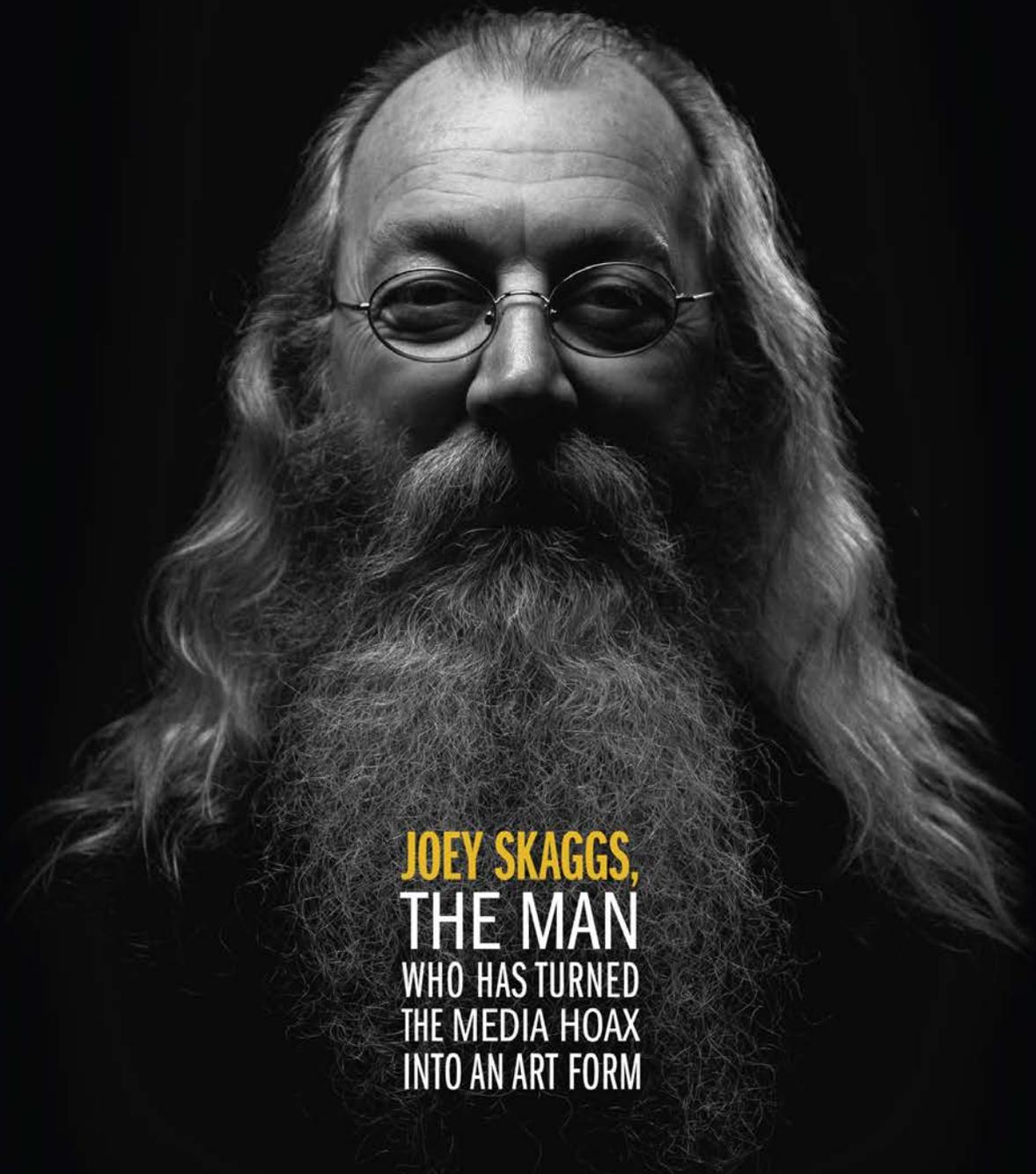
10 000 dólares

Discos vendidos pelos artistas internacionais

1 milhão de cópias

Cachê médio

60 000 dólares



JOEY SKAGGS,
THE MAN
WHO HAS TURNED
THE MEDIA HOAX
INTO AN ART FORM

ART OF THE PRANK

a docu-film by Andrea Marini

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Denver weather: Seasonal weekend before snow Monday



Sneak peek at Rhein Haus: brats, beer and bocce

Denver Film Festival: Five ways to go out with a bang

By John Wenzel
The Denver Post

POSTED: 11/13/2015 12:01:00 AM MST | UPDATED: A DAY AGO

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Zoë Bell plays a photojournalist uncovering the truth behind a group of Colombian missionaries who might not be what they seem in "Camino." (Provided by Bleiberg Entertainment)

The 38th Denver Film Festival has plowed through dozens of films and panels. But in true movie fashion, it has been saving its big climax for the third act.

The Nov. 4-15 event wraps up this weekend with red carpet screenings, awards, celebrity guests and more. Here are five can't-miss offerings for which tickets are still available.

Tickets for most screenings are \$20-\$40 and available at denverfilm.org/festival.

"The Art of the Prank"



"The Art of Prank" follows longtime activist and culture jammer Joey Skaggs as he pranks various newspapers, TV networks and radio stations. (Andrea Marini, Provided by Relight Films)

amusement? Skaggs and director Andrea Marini will be there for a Q&A after each screening. (2 p.m. Nov. 13, 3:45 p.m. Nov. 14, 11:30 a.m. Nov. 15 at UA Denver Pavilions)

"Camino"

Zoë Bell's sold-out "One on One" festival panel at the Sie FilmCenter on Nov. 14 will trace her fascinating career from a stuntwoman and frequent Quentin Tarantino collaborator (including in the upcoming, Colorado-shot Western "The Hateful Eight") to a leading lady. But audiences can

The media's ability to shape public opinion gets exploited in this documentary, which follows longtime activist and culture jammer Joey Skaggs as he pranks various newspapers, TV networks and radio stations. Is Skaggs' humorous subversion art, civil disobedience or self-indulgent

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see her in action in this new survival thriller from director Josh C. Wauer, which places her as a photojournalist in 1980s Colombia who has just witnessed a life-threatening horror. (6:30 p.m. Nov. 13 at UA Denver Pavilions)

"Carol" and "Coming Through the Rye"

The festival's final two red carpet screenings — both of which take place on its "closing night" (even if other events continue through Nov. 15) — will let audiences see a couple of buzz-worthy films before their wider release. Todd Haynes' sumptuous, simmering period drama "Carol," starring Cate Blanchett and Rooney Mara, is the matinee while director James Sadwith's "Coming Through the Rye," which features festival Rising Star recipient Alex Wolff, is a semi-autobiographical coming-of-age story about looking for author J.D. Salinger. (2:30 p.m. and 8 p.m., respectively, at Ellie Caulkins Opera House)



Jamie Schwartz (Alex Wolff), obsessed with Holden Caulfield, runs away from boarding school to find reclusive author J.D. Salinger in "Coming through the Rye." Inspired by actual events, Jamie's search for Salinger becomes a journey into sexual awakening, love and loss. (Provided by River Bend Pictures)

Denver Film Festival Awards Brunch

Outside of the marquee TV events such as the Oscars, Emmys and Golden Globes, most award ceremonies are stuffy, private affairs. But for the first time this year, the film fest is holding an awards brunch and opening it to the public. See who impressed the jury the most across the 250-plus-film event while you toss back Bloody Marys and mimosas at the kitschy Curtis Hotel, surrounded by filmmakers and other festival-goers. (\$60, 11 a.m. Nov. 15 at 1405 Curtis St.)

"She's the Best Thing in It"

Tony winner Mary Louise Wilson gets her due as a longtime stage and on-screen character actress from friends and colleagues such as Frances McDormand, Melissa Leo, Tyne Daly, Valerie Harper, Estelle Parsons and more. What's it like devoting your life to acting? A group of Tulane University acting students will find out as this feisty 83-year-old unloads her decades of experience. (1:30 p.m. Nov. 13, 4:15 p.m. Nov. 14, 11:45 a.m. Nov. 15)

John Wenzel: 303-954-1642, jwenzel@denverpost.com or [@johnwenzel](https://twitter.com/johnwenzel)



Tony Award winner Mary Louise Wilson, right, travels to her hometown of New Orleans to teach acting to skeptical members of the

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On the Ground at Slamdance 2016

A wide array of voices, as subversive and vital as ever.

By [Alece Oxendine](#) January 27, 2016 [Tweet](#) [Like 62](#) [Leave a Comment](#)



At the very top of Park City, Utah's Main Street, and nestled in the cozy Treasure Mountain Inn, is *Slamdance*, a festival by filmmakers, for filmmakers. Now in its twentieth year, this treasure of a festival is as subversive as ever. Slamdance presents another wide array of voices via shorts, features and documentaries. Here is just a very brief overview, only capturing a fraction of this excellently alternative and devastatingly essential festival.



'Excursions'

Excursions

[Daniel Martinico's](#) trippy and primal film follows two couples in the woods for an existential experience. Those familiar with Martinico's work (like *OK, Good*) will know the physical demands he places on actors, and this film is no different. There are parts that will make you uncomfortable, but in the best way possible, leaving you to appreciate the actors' hard work. This film plays on all senses and holds nothing back.



'Art of the Prank'

Art of the Prank

If you don't know who [Joey Skaggs](#) is, know this: he is a f*cking national treasure! One of the best pranksters in history, Skaggs has consistently exposed the chronic gullibility of the American news media. We see him provide comical and sometimes biting commentary on our society in *Art of the Prank*, all carried out with deadpan precision.

Watch on Fandor



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OK, Good

Guided by motivational affirmations and encouraged by an intense physical-movement workshop, actor Paul Kaplan struggles through a series of demoralizing auditions that push him towards...



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"Certain to be this year's most singular and ambitious comedy."



Here Are the Winners of the 2016 Slamdance Film Festival

By Zack Sharf | Indiewire
January 29, 2016 at 10:52AM

After being picked up by Animal Planet and Lionsgate earlier this week, Brian Golden Davis' "The Million Dollar Duck" walked away from Slamdance with two top awards.



"Million Dollar Duck"

Slamdance Film Festival

The 22nd Slamdance Film Festival came to an end last night as organizers bestowed this year's Sparky awards in the Audience, Jury and Sponsored Categories. The award winners were announced at the festival's annual awards ceremony at the Treasure Mountain Inn in Park City, Utah.

[READ MORE: Here Are the Sundance 2016 Short Film Winners](#)

In keeping with tradition, juries of leading industry experts and filmmakers determined the Slamdance Awards for the Narrative Feature, Documentary Feature and Short Film categories. The Audience Awards, as well as the Spirit of Slamdance, an award given by the filmmakers of Slamdance 2016 to the filmmaker who best embodies the spirit of the festival, were also awarded. The feature competition films in the Documentary and Narrative Programs were limited to first-time filmmakers working with production budgets of less than \$1 million.

"Congratulations to all of the filmmakers this year," said Peter Baxter, Slamdance President and co-founder, in an official statement. "Outside of winning a Sparky, as a collective they showed us the power of real independent film and how much it enriches our lives."

Below are the winners of the 2016 Slamdance Film Festival:

Audience Award for Narrative Feature

"Honey Bunnies," Alex Simmons

Audience Award for Documentary Feature

"The Million Dollar Duck," Brian Golden Davis

Jury Award for Narrative Feature

"Driftwood," Paul Taylor



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Jury Honorable Mention for Acting - Narrative Feature
"Hunky Dorky," starring Tomas Pais and Edouard Holdener

Jury Award for Documentary Feature
"The Million Dollar Duck," Brian Golden Davis



"Art of the Prank"

Jury Honorable Mention for Documentary Feature
"Art of the Prank," Andrea Marini

Jury Award for Documentary Short
"If Mama Ain't Happy, Nobody's Happy," Mea de Jong

Jury Honorable Mention for Cinematography - Documentary Short
"The Bullet," cinematography by Mike Gioulakis

Jury Award for Narrative Short
"Winter Hymns," Dusty Mancinelli

Jury Honorable Mention for Narrative Short
"The Beast," Daina Oniunas

Jury Award for Animation Short
"My Dad," Marcus Armitage

Jury Honorable Mention for Animation Short
"Flaws," Josh Shaffner

Jury Award for Experimental Short
"Infrastructures," Aurèle Ferrier

Jury Honorable Mention for Experimental Short
"Cup of Stars," Ryan Betschart, Tyler Betschart

Jury Award for Anarchy Short
"Disco Inferno," Alice Waddington

Jury Honorable Mention for Anarchy Short
"Gwillam," Brian Lonano

Jury Honorable Mention for Anarchy Short
"Hi How Are You Daniel Johnston?," Gabriel Sunday

Digital Bolex Fearless Filmmaking Grand Prize
"Small Talk," Hilary Campbell

Digital Bolex Fearless Filmmaking Honorable Mention
"You Will Find A Way," A.J. Molle

Digital Bolex Fearless Filmmaking Honorable Mention
"Eyes of the City," Luke Randall

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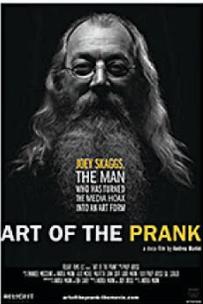


THE ART OF THE PRANK

Don't Believe Everything You Read

by Jessica Baxter February 2, 2016 0

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(The 2016 Slamdance Film Festival has come to a close but the reviews can't stop! Won't stop!)

Artist, Joey Skaggs, has been orchestrating elaborate pranks since the 1970's. But the difference between what he does and, say, the people who post bogus articles on Facebook, is that exposing the truth is a crucial part of Skaggs' mission. In this way, he is able to shed some light on social issues and, more importantly, embarrass the media for failing to do their due diligence. He's always known exactly what elements he needs to include for baiting big news outlets like CNN, the Village Voice, and the Huffington Post. Director Andrea Marini profiles Skaggs in his fascinating new documentary, *The Art of the Prank*. Marini crosscuts to the greatest hits of Skaggs' past and back to the present as plans for his latest prank unfold.

Skaggs conceived his life's work after the local news misinterpreted a Vietnam protest he organized as merely a gathering of littering hippies. He was dismayed that they had gotten it so wrong. He wondered how outlandish a story had to be before they would actually do any investigation, so he decided to test his theory. What he does aren't merely April Fools jokes. Usually there's a social message behind the deception. The main one being, don't believe everything that you hear. Someone isn't necessarily an authority simply because they present themselves as such. The media manipulates us all the time. Why not manipulate them back?

Among his most successful fake business ventures: a dog brothel, a celebrity sperm bank, a mobile confessional, a cure-all pill made from cockroaches, and a coma vacation package a la [Total Recall](#). Even when his political intent isn't apparent, there's at least an element of humor involved.

Interviews with past collaborators, Skaggs' friend, actor Robert Forster, and his mother, help to flesh out the man behind the myth. It's clear that many admire him. One of his present-day collaborators learned about him in her media studies class and, as a result, was a bit star-struck during their initial meeting. He has also influenced other socially conscious artists such as [The Yes Men](#) and Improv Everywhere.



The Art of the Prank is a fun way to spend 90 minutes, even if Marini's present-day narrative isn't always easy to follow. It's never entirely clear what the end game is for Skaggs' latest work, a fake GMO documentary. But Skaggs is an enigmatic figure and it's entralling to watch people fall for his ruse over and over again.

But what if the greatest trick Joey Skaggs ever pulled is convincing the world that he exists?

— Jessica Baxter (@TehBaxter)

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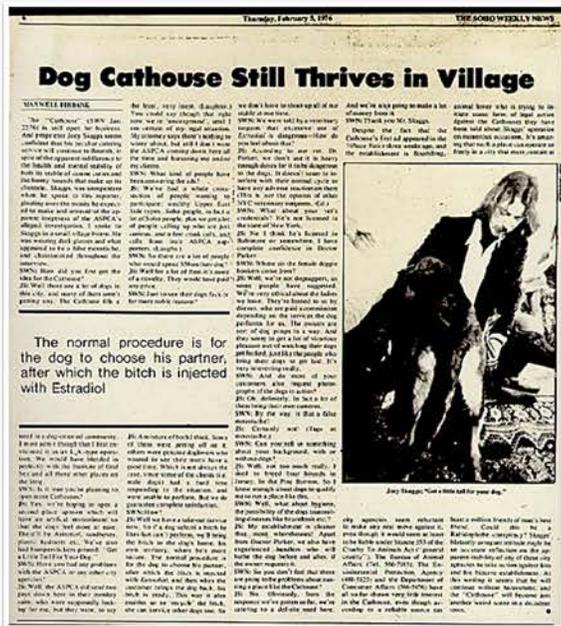


Decade: 2010s Year: 2016 Director: Andrea Marini Country of Origin: Italy, U.S., United Kingdom

Tags: chill it's just a prank, director interviews, director's first film, documentaries about artists, how media can be foolish, Reminds me of Exit Through the Gift Shop

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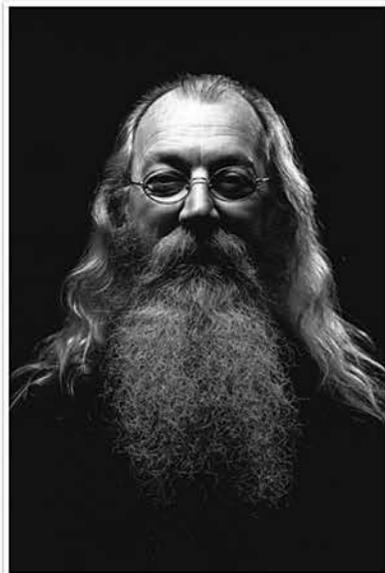
What ART OF THE PRANK reveals about news media, featuring MAKING A MURDERER, PEACE OFFICER, and THE HUNTING GROUND



by Chris Lambert

Do you like the feeling of discovering some new artist that you've never heard of but is actually prolific and fascinating? Well then I have an artist for you.

Joey Skaggs.



Skaggs, born in 1945, a graduate of New York City's School of the Visual Arts, is a performance artist famous for conducting elaborate media hoaxes. For example. In 1976, Skaggs pretended to be the proprietor of a "cathouse for dogs". Yeah, a brothel for dogs. He put an ad in the Village Voice. People thought it was real. Hundreds called him. Multiple news outlets wanted to interview the dog pimp. To keep the hoax alive, Skaggs brought 25 actors and 15 dogs together in a loft and had them act as though they were customers. He had a phony veterinarian on staff to further the hoax. The media ate it up. People freaked out. ABC aired a story about it. Then the ASCPA, Bureau of Animal Affairs, the NYPD vice squad, and the NYC Mayor's office mobilized to shut everything down. The Attorney General sent Skaggs a subpoena.

"On April 1, 1976, in answer to the subpoena, Skaggs called a press conference at the Attorney General's office. He announced it was a conceptual performance piece, that the whole thing was a hoax. He was forced to give and swear to a deposition and the case was dropped.

WABC TV never retracted the story, leaving millions to believe that somewhere in New York City there still exists a bordello for dogs. When asked about this later, the WABC TV producer insisted that Skaggs had said it was a hoax to avoid prosecution, and expressed bitterness because the documentary, which had been nominated for an Emmy Award, had been knocked out of the running."

Skaggs has been doing work like this for 40 years, ranging from cure-all vitamins derived from cockroaches, to celebrity sperm banks, to a computer program that could analyze crime evidence and render a guilty or not guilty verdict, and so much more. It's about time someone made a documentary about him.

Art of the Prank explores Joey Skaggs, the man, the artist. It shows us the impact Skaggs's media hoax art has had on his life, and his reasons for making the art that he makes.

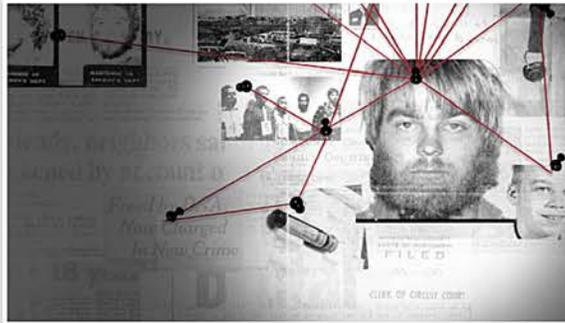
We're shown footage of the hoaxes, given backstory on them, their set-ups, the goal of each hoax, the meaning behind each one, how they went, what happened afterwards, etc.



Watching *Art of the Prank*, it's easy to get caught up in Joey's biography. And, especially, in the details of his media hoaxes. I found myself continuously looking forward to the next hoax, what it would be, how it would be executed, etc. I think it would be really easy to watch *Art of the Prank* only as biography of Joey Skaggs the person and the artist. But there's more going on.

Underlying Joey's story and his pranks is a pretty polite condemnation of the media. In this way, Andrea Marini's *Art of the Prank* shares a similar style to Netflix's *Making a Murderer*.

Making a Murderer is a 10-hour, 10 episode series that details the astounding case of Steven Avery, a man who may have been falsely imprisoned twice. Twice.



The first two episodes detail Steven's early years, the situation regarding his initial imprisonment for a rape he didn't commit, then, 18 years later, his exoneration via new DNA evidence. We get into Avery's pending lawsuit against Manitowoc County, his life after jail. And then the plot takes a turn. Two years after Avery's release, a woman's been murdered and Avery is the main suspect. The remaining eight episodes follow the details surrounding the police work to find out what happened to the victim, Teresa Halbach, then Avery's arrest. The bulk of the show deals with Avery's court case: the pre-trial stuff, the trial, what happened after the trial.

The complication to *Making a Murderer* is that it's not entirely clear what happened to Teresa and whether or not Avery was involved. Every piece of evidence that points to Avery might also point to police framing Avery, the same group of police that framed Avery nearly 20 years earlier.

Making a Murderer has been a huge sensation because everyone comes away asking the same question, "Is Avery guilty or not?" The documentary can't tell us. So many of us have started 2016 by asking one another if we think Avery is or isn't the murderer, and why we think it was or wasn't him, who we think might have done it, etc.

Many people who have watched *Making a Murderer* come away from it thinking the filmmakers, Moira Demos and Mary Manhardt, wanted to show Steven Avery was innocent.

That wasn't their point.

Their point of *Making a Murderer* is to show how fucked up the American judicial system is. How that system can be manipulated. How it can fail to live up to its own ideals of "innocent until proven guilty" and that the prosecution must prove guilt "beyond reasonable doubt".

This misunderstanding occurs because at no point in *Making a Murderer* is there a big speech from the filmmakers, or anyone else, saying, "HEY, LOOK HOW MESSED UP THE COURT SYSTEM IS! THIS HAPPENS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY. IT'S TERRIBLE. WE SHOULD DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT." We have people who express their disbelief about what's happening. But there's no direct statements that clarify the main points.

Contrary to *Making a Murderer's* style, we have *Peace Officer* and *The Hunting Ground*. Both give us expert testimony that condemn their subjects.

In *Peace Officer*, it's experts telling us that the militarization of police have changed the mentality of police, that police are using lethal force when they shouldn't be, and, worst of all, police are lying to us about the use of lethal force.

And *The Hunting Ground* has experts telling us that sexual assault is a common thing on college campuses, which is scary, and complicating the matter is that university administrators have more reason to ignore and downplay sexual assault than acknowledging it's an issue and working to make it less of one. You come away from both of those documentaries knowing exactly what the problem is, why it's a problem, and why we should be upset about it.

Art of the Prank, by collecting the media hoaxes of Joey Skaggs and showing them to us one at a time, reveals, again and again, how desperate media outlets are for stories, how fallible their reporting can be. This isn't a matter of objectivity vs. subjectivity in the news. It's a matter of trust. Can we trust anything that's being reported to us? *Art of the Prank* is a reminder that we should be cautious of the media. Just because they're "professionals" and "news authorities" doesn't mean they live up to professional or journalistic ideals. That, even if they mean well, they aren't infallible. If they aren't fact checking a guy who said he's created a wonder-drug that cures all human ills...what are they fact checking?



Art of the Prank and *Making a Murderer* show us rather than tell us. This is dangerous because people could, as they've done with *Making a Murderer*, miss the main point completely. But *Art of the Prank*, and movies like it, is a special experience because it creates the scenario for an ah-ha moment. We're provided with all the necessary information to have the realization the film want us to have, to arrive at the main point through our own introspection and analysis. It's like the 90/10 rule of kissing. You lean 90, you let the other person go the last 10. It can be shocking if someone just leans in and kisses you. It can be really intense and romantic if someone leans close enough to kiss you but doesn't kiss you, challenging you to make the final move.



Art of the Prank not only raises awareness of Joey Skaggs and his unique style of art, but will, hopefully, cause its viewers to expect, want, and demand higher standards from the news media.

5 Great Films From the 2016 Slamdance Film Festival

5 Great Films From the 2016 Slamdance Film Festival

Greg Cwik
Feb 4, 2016 12:30 pm
@gregcwik1



READ MORE: [Here Are the Winners of the 2016 Slamdance Film Festival](#)

The Slamdance Film Festival may take place in parallel to Sundance, but it's not a cultural behemoth like the bigger Park City gathering. But the festival, founded in 1995, which has helped to spur the careers of Christopher Nolan and Lena Dunham, is replete with promising shoestring films and young performers on the cusp of critical recognition. Here are five highlights from this year's recently-concluded lineup.

"Fursonas"

Director Dominic Rodriguez offers an intimate look at the secretive subculture of Fursonas (a portmanteau of "furry" and "persona"), or "Furries," plushy anthropomorphic avatars donned by role-players. Fursona conventions date back to the early eighties, though members (understandably) try to keep the group out of the public eye. As with most of the films of the list, eccentricity of character plays heavily into the film's appeal, though no other film of Slamdance 2016 can boast an androgynous, sexually-frustrated dog named Boomer (nee Gary Matthews) who engenders a war between factions of Furries because he gives the esoteric coterie a "bad image." Irreverent yet earnest, "Fursonas" is a fascinating, if not nearly exhaustive jaunt into a culture few people know anything about.

"Honey Buddies"



When David (David Giuntoli) gets ditched at the proverbial wedding altar, his would-be best man Flula (Flula Borg) convinces David that the two of them should go on the backpacking honeymoon David had planned, cheering David up and improving their friendship. The pair encounter a host of eccentric characters, as one does when trekking through strange lands in a self-aware indie bromance. The male leads have contagious zest; when Flula whips out the toxic-colored t-shirts that bear the film's title on them, you can see the gloom slowly dissipate from David's eyes. The homoerotic subtext is more like parenthetical text, so obvious yet playfully silly is the BFF brouhaha. The Emmy-nominated director uses his experience shooting documentaries to give the film a naturalistic, easy-breezy feeling.

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Review: The 2016 Emmys Thrive, Thanks to Moving Moments and Welcome Surprises

Jimmy Kimmel did a fine job hosting, but it was the speeches and surprises that made the 2016 Emmys a night to remember.

Podcasts

"Driftwood"

Like "The Tribe," one of 2015's best and ballsiest films, "Driftwood" is devoid of dialogue; unlike "The Tribe," also one of 2015's most relentlessly depressing endeavors. "Driftwood" has a female lead, deftly portrayed by Joslyn Jensen. The solipsistic tone and claustrophobic environment may draw comparisons to "Room," but "Driftwood" is less tear-jerky. The monotonous pacing and preference for static shots gives the micro-budget film a feeling of quotidian unease and existential boredom. It feels longer than its 72-minute runtime, and isn't as fun as "Honey Buddies" or "Fursonas," but Paul Taylor's film commits to its formal device and doesn't pander to its audience. Keep an eye on singer-writer-actress Jensen — hers is an enthralling presence.

"Art of the Prank"

The hoax with the most. Joe Skaggs, prank artist par excellence and professional ball-buster, is the subject of this voyeuristic film. Skaggs, a 70-year-old "culture jammer," has been an enigmatic presence for 50 years. His notable gags include tying a 50-foot bra to the front of the U.S. Treasury building on Wall Street, proclaiming himself to be a cockroach expert named Dr. Gregor (get it? the media didn't), and sending imposters to stand in for him during interviews. He also helped ABC News win an Emmy for their coverage of a fake dog brothel Skaggs advertised in The Village Voice in 1976. The film, named after Skaggs' blog, wisely avoids trying to one-up its subject's hijinks. The camera stays relatively still, gazing at Skaggs, taking in his absurdity like one of the passing onlookers who so often comprise his audience.

"Neptune"



Derek Kimball channels the spirit of Terrence Malick for his spirit-of-nature film before veering into surreal ghost story territory. The \$37,000 "Neptune," which stars the prodigiously talented Jane Ackerman as a young girl being raised by a priest, is introspective and rife with the hushed whispers of Malick, as well as the sinuous, gliding shots of water and forest, but the film gradually comes into its own, finds an identity as it meditates on grief and how a young mind (and soul) processes death.

Kimball displays dexterous control behind the camera, and manages to take Maine, a state not known for its thriving film culture, into a lush, vibrant character. But the film belongs to young Ackerman, whose previous credits include local theater productions of "A Christmas Carol" in Portland. The film took three years to shoot, so Ackerman starts the film at 14 and finishes at 17, and her off-screen growing manifests in on-screen emotional maturity. She gives one of the festival's best performances.

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CUFF presents the chronicles of Joey Skaggs' career in 'The Art of the Prank'

Monday 04th, April 2016 / 11:01

in • AB - Features, • Alberta, • Cover Stories, • Features, CITY, FEATURES, FILM

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By Breanna Whipple



CALGARY — This format in which you're consuming serves as an exemplary component of iconic media prankster Joey Skaggs' life mission. For Skaggs, reality became a malleable subject at a very young age. One of Skaggs' teachers painted the largest picture of all, diminishing each individual to a single molecule in this vast universe. That is when Skaggs changed forever.

Initially pursuing a career in fine art, he found himself bored by the dull process and lack of immediacy. With so much emotional turmoil fuelled by the Vietnam War, Skaggs decided to combine political commentary with art, resulting in a well thought-out protest. Curating a Vietnamese nativity scene, which he and a band of hippies obliterated later by flames, the media twisted the events and spawned a story full of fallacies. This aftermath, like his experience with that teacher so many years ago, worked as a catalyst for self-discovery — he realized that he could use his unique form of art to challenge the system.

Becoming "The Godfather of the Media Hoax" did not occur overnight. It was a lengthy, ingenious process that expanded from the late 1960s continuing to the present day. One of his earliest, most legendary hoaxes began in 1976. Skaggs managed to publish an ad for a dog brothel in the alternative weekly newspaper *The Village Voice*. Expanding on the fib in the same ways he would for several years to come, he hired actors to play along to receive airtime on various news outlets, in this instance ABC News. Gaining attention from both the APSCA and the Bureau of Animal Affairs, Skaggs was finally moved to reveal the truth in order to avoid a court hearing. Did this stop him from executing episodes of culture jamming? Not a chance in hell.



The Art of the Prank follows "the Godfather of the Media Hoax," Joey Skaggs.

The Art of the Prank is an aesthetically striking documentary that chronicles Skaggs' fascinating career as a professional anti-establishment prankster. Having pulled off truly unbelievable stories over a large magnitude of decades, his mission to expose media bias in such a tongue-in-cheek manner is unlike anything that has yet to be offered. Instilling belief of the existence of things such as a celebrity sperm bank auction or a fat squad that chains up refrigerators to impulsive reporters is only the tip of the iceberg of his extensive lists of accomplishments.

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By Colin Gallant September 18, 2016
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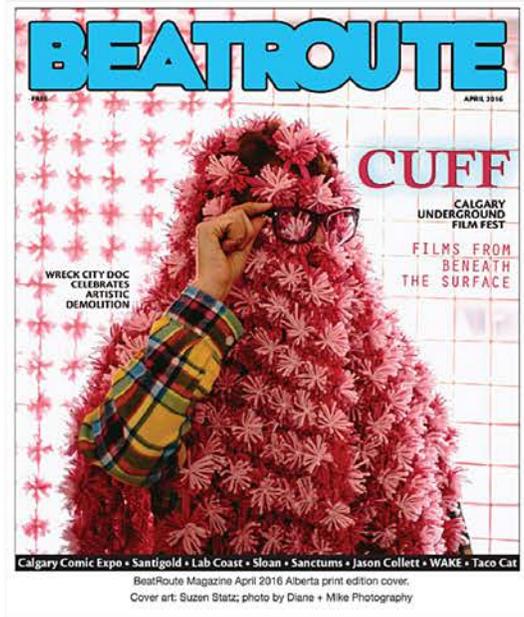


Though obviously humorous on the surface, Skaggs' life mission is also a very important one. Skaggs warns us that we must all be skeptical of the media-dominated world. We are currently in a time where an endless amount of information is a mere click away, allowing irresponsible words to be believed by those who are quick to accept opinion for fact. Skaggs set the groundwork for future generations to continue the art of exposing the bloodhounds of mainstream media. It is all too easy to swallow words and ignore the facts. This film demonstrates the importance of taking risks, specifically opening your eyes and thinking for yourself. Don't be submissive – question everything.

The Art of the Prank makes its Canadian premiere at the Calgary Underground Film Festival, with two shows scheduled April 16 (at 6:30 p.m.) and April 17 (at 1:30 p.m.).

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Andrea Marini's "Art of the Prank" Pays Tribute to Artist and Media Hoaxster Joey Skaggs



The "Art of the Prank," about multimedia artist and ultimate media prankster Joey Skaggs, is slated to open the 2016 Lower East Side Film Festival on Thursday, June 9.

The **Lower East Side Film Festival** is kicking off their 2016 lineup Thursday night with **Art of the Prank**, an excellent documentary about the multimedia satirist **Joey Skaggs**. Skaggs, a former downtown NY artist who studied, and later taught, at SVA, is considered by many to be the godfather of the media hoax. His live antics are witty theatrical events that spring out of social activism and wry commentary, often involving a large team of co-conspirators that stay "in character" for months at a time.

Skaggs has pulled off a multitude of public pranks over the last few decades, such as the "Celebrity Sperm Bank," the "Cathouse for Dogs" (a fake whorehouse for dogs), the "Fat Squad" (a team of people that block you from your refrigerator) and "Portofess" (a mobile confessional booth at political conventions) — all reported as fact by prestigious journalists, numerous publications and TV news shows.

The film won a special jury mention at the 2016 Slamdance Film Festival and has screened in festivals internationally since then, but this is its New York premiere. Both Skaggs and the director, Andrea Marini will be in attendance on Thursday evening.

Skaggs was introduced to Marini while giving a talk in Rome and says he appreciated the young Italian director's enthusiasm. "He seemed very dedicated and I wanted to give him a chance. I try to give young people a chance because no one gave me a chance when I was a young person," he said.

Skaggs handed over hundreds of hours of archival footage, press clippings and photos he had saved throughout his career. "So he knew I trusted him, but I didn't make it easy for him," he said. "[With that much material to sort through] you could have done a hundred different films, he couldn't possibly have used everything."

The tightly woven film combines archival footage with interviews of friends and admirers (including the comedy collective Improv Everywhere's founder Charlie Todd and the Lower East Side's very own Reverend Jen Miller) along with an inside look at Skaggs' most recent hoax. To the filmmakers' credit, the story keeps the audience in suspense and is highly entertaining throughout.

After devoting almost four years to the project, Marini said he's relieved and delighted to see *Art of the Prank* screening at so many festivals and on the brink of a distribution deal. "I had no idea where it would go, I always believed in it, but at some point you are so close to the project, you just don't know..." he said.

Asked if he's worried that his cover will finally be blown by this film, Skaggs laughs. "I've been asked that for 50 years — I've been on the same news shows multiple times for different hoaxes (and has used his own name) and they've never made the connection," he said. "I've seen over and over that the story is more important than the name or the person [or the facts] for these guys."

The important thing to note about this film, however is that it is a "real" documentary. "Just to do a hoax here would be a cheap shot," says Skaggs, "the fact that [this is] all real is the powerful thing."

And a fitting tribute as well.

The Lower East Side Film Festival opens Thursday, June 9th at the Sunshine Cinema and runs eight nights straight, through Thursday, June 16. Visit the website [here](#) for more details and the full schedule. TLD is the proud local media sponsor of the 2016 Lower East Side Film Festival.

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By Traven Rice in Arts, Film Club on June 8, 2016 4:30 pm

joey skaggs



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If You're Reading This, You've Already Been Conned: Joey Skaggs Doc Premieres in LES

Film documenting media hoax artist opens up LES Film Festival

By [Spencer Roth-Rose](#) • 06/13/16 11:15am



Joey Skaggs shrugged off camera crews who came to see his 1976 "celebrity sperm auction," but were left wanting after a supposed burglar made off with the goods. In reality, no such high-profile sperm had ever existed. Photo by Art of the Prank

Good God, we're easy to fool.

It feels a bit counterintuitive to be writing, in the media, about media hoaxer Joey Skaggs. Skaggs, who was [interviewed](#) this past week by the Observer, has made a name for himself since the 1960s through elaborate pranks that aim to highlight the absurdity of our media culture. So how's a writer to know he's not being punk'd by a man who describes fooling the media "as easy as a bowel movement"?

A new documentary detailing the greatest hits of Skaggs's hoaxing career opened up the [Lower East Side Film Festival](#) on Thursday night. *Art of the Prank*, directed by Italian newcomer Andrea Marini, is both an upbeat summary of decades of mischief (a confession booth on the back of a tricycle, a brothel for dogs, cockroaches that hold the key to the human immune system, each one eagerly lapped up by hasty news outlets), and an intimate portrait of an earnest man earnestly engaged in the business of tomfoolery.

For all his public silliness, Skaggs takes his work seriously indeed. Looking like a cross between Lou Reed and a rabbi, and with the colorful language of the former, he opens up to Marini about his philosophy as an artist. Everything's intentional – his pranks are thoughtfully conceived, meticulously planned, and then, when it

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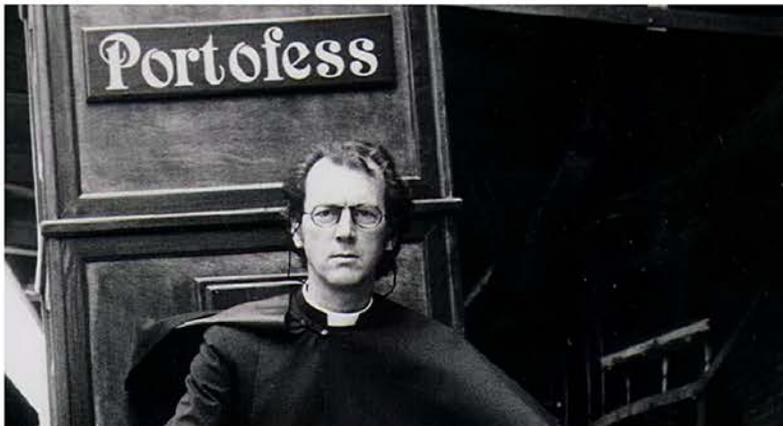
comes time to execute, almost completely winged. (“It was really like Second City,” says co-conspirator Sara Jones.) He’s intensely aware of what his pranks are doing; if they force embarrassed news outlets to interrogate their influence and maybe even consider instituting a (gasp!) better system of fact-checking, if they remind the public to always be skeptical of what they read, see, and hear – well, then consider it a prank well pulled.

It would be easy to think that Joey Skaggs hates the media. That’s not true. It’s a symbiotic relationship between the leviathan and the crusader.

He’s reliant on the predictability of the media cycle. He doesn’t want to fool the public as much as poke holes in a tradition of shoddy, me-first reporting. Even after his 1990 “Comacocoon” hoax had been revealed in the *New York Times*, Skaggs continued the charade for an Italian reporter whom he deemed “lazy” for not having done her research.

The trick to fooling, Skaggs describes, is to ground a “fuckin’ far out” idea in an element of plausibility. Make it obvious in hindsight that the story isn’t real, but with just the right touch that you’d believe it if you heard it coming from CNN. After all, people do crazy things on the news every day, right? We’ve been conditioned to accept the news as fact, as gospel. And that’s something Skaggs has been fighting against his whole career.

Despite the length of that career (50 years and counting, though after every hoax he says he’s retiring), Skaggs maintains a tone of incredulity at the ease with which he fools. He’s never been caught, never been forced to apologize. And he simply can’t believe the ride has lasted this long, especially when he uses his own name for a character he’s portraying, as if daring us to catch him in the act. Though the disguises may change (including a ridiculous Panama hat/suit getup for a WNBC talk show in 1981 that was somehow not a dead giveaway), you can spot the gleam in his eye from a mile away.



Come on, the guy can barely keep from laughing. Photo by Art of the Prank

That archived footage is on full display in the documentary. Marini pored over 150 hours of news archives and shot at least that much in additional footage while following Skaggs through the orchestration of his latest hoax. That last part is actually the most illuminating; we see Skaggs directing his actors, adapting the material, trying to hit upon the exact right tone to make the story ridiculous yet believable. It's the business side of things, and through *Art of the Prank* we see the behind-the-scenes care that goes into a performance that seems so effortless, so natural.

As for the man and his foe? It would be easy to think, based on some pretty blatant evidence, that Joey Skaggs hates the media. That's not true. It's a symbiotic relationship between the leviathan and the crusader, a system of checks and balances. He needs its cooperation in order to expose its flaws, and it hasn't disappointed yet. It's important to him to be able to laugh with the people he's fooled after it's all over, to share a mutual understanding of the machine that is the news cycle and how to short-circuit it.

But did the film capture his philosophy? Is he satisfied with how it's portrayed his life's work? Surely the dedicated Marini has distilled something akin to the *real* Joey Skaggs?

"Of course not. It's all bullshit," he replies. But the gleam returning to his eye says otherwise.



FILED UNDER: CULTURE JAMMING, JOEY SKAGGS, LOWER EAST SIDE FILM FESTIVAL, MEDIA, MEDIA HOAX, NEW YORK, PREMIERE, THE ART OF THE PRANK



Revelation International Film Festival Launch with preview of documentary feature *The Art of the Prank*

June 15, 2016 No Comments 56 Views Film Team Dircksey

By Sarah Stopforth

The energy was undeniable standing in the buzzing foyer of Luna Leederville, which was filled to the brim with excited film buffs for the launch of the Revelation International Film Festival 2016.

Once seated, with lovely churros provided by Guzman Y Gomez, we heard from Festival Director Richard Sovada and Program Director Jack Sargeant as they introduced what we can expect from the festival this year.

Don't know what the Revelation Film Festival is about? As described so poignantly on their website:

"The festival was designed to showcase ideas 'at point' in contemporary independent film and find a place for them in a conservative cinema and social environment."

The festival has been running since 1997, and 2016 is their biggest year yet with over 120 international films presented at cinemas, galleries, cafes and bars in Perth for the two weeks the festival is running.

Film and Video lecturer at ECU, Keith Smith, has been encouraging his students to go, volunteer and simply get involved since I started my degree. So finally going, and seeing him there, among other students and like-minded people, everything came full circle. Not by just *being there*, but enjoying the hell out of it.

As a special treat, the team at Revelation screened one of the many documentary features in the festival program, *The Art of the Prank* (Director Andrea Marini, USA, ITALY, UK). The film follows the clever and hilarious pranks of "the Godfather of the media hoax" Joey Skaggs and his career, past and present.

He began his work in the late '60s, using the medium of performance to challenge and subvert the American media. From large and small scale performance pranks from the ridiculous likes of "The Fat Squad," "Brothel for Dogs," posing as a pastor riding his bike around NYC with a portable confession booth on the back of his bike, and "Hippie Bus Tour to Queens" – the list goes on! All of these pranks garnered massive media attention, therefore successfully achieving what Skaggs wanted – for people to critically assess what they're watching, and a "f*** you" to the very manipulative media world.

The Art of the Prank was hysterical, sometimes shocking and ridiculous, but mostly inspiring and thought provoking. The media influences us daily and Joey, through his art, reminds us: Don't believe everything you're told.

Revelation International Film Festival commences on July 7 until July 17.

Check out the program of films here!

THE ART OF THE PRANK is showing at selected Luna Palace Cinemas, beginning on July 10. You can watch the trailer below.



Art of the Prank – Teaser Trailer from Relight Films on Vimeo.



Revelation International Film Festival Launch with preview of documentary feature *The Art of the Prank*



Tips to Picking a (Livable) European Party Hostel



Moving Out



Review: Chasing Asylum



The DC Soundtrack That Could Have Been



Perth International Jazz Festival: Day 3



Review: Fag/Slag



Cleverman - A First in Australian TV



Down Mystery Road... Ivan Sen: Storyteller of a Generation



What Do You Carry With You? - A Travel Checklist

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Film Festival Roundup: Lower East Side Film Festival Unveils Winners, Telluride Names Guest Director and More

Keep up with the always-hopping film festival world with our weekly Film Festival Roundup column.



Kate Erbland
41 mins ago
@katerbland



"Art of the Prank"

Keep up with the always-hopping film festival world with our weekly Film Festival Roundup column.

- EXCLUSIVE: The 6th Annual [Lower East Side Film Festival](#) and their 2016 panel of judges, including Ethan Hawke, Cindy Tolan, Steve Farneth and Raul Castillo have announced their winners. Check them out below.

- Best Feature Film - "Americana" - By Zachary Shedd
- Best Live Action Short Film - "Killer" - By Matt Kazman
- Best Animated Short Film - "The Mega Plush: Episode I" - By Matt Burniston
- Best Music Video - The Knocks' "Collect My Love" - By Austin Peters, Music by The Knocks, featuring Alex Newell
- Best Documentary Short Film - "Erosion" - By Brandon Bloch, Tim Sessler and Brandon Bray
- The Advocacy Award Presented by Here TV - "Video" - By Randy Yang
- The LESFF Neighborhood Award - "Streit's: Matzo and the American Dream" - By Michael Levine
- Best of Fest, The LESFF Prix D'Or - "Art of the Prank" - By Andrea Marini
- Audience Award - "The Babymooners" - By Shaina Feinberg & Chris Manley



Volker Schlöndorff's "Diplomacy"

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Art of the Prank

There's something joyful about sitting down and watching a film that you have no prior knowledge of before it's unveiled on the silver screen in front of you. There's no pre-conceived notions as to what the film should be; there hasn't been countless YouTube reaction videos to its trailers and frame by frame dissections of 'what does this mean'. It's simply a film laid bare for you to experience.

That's how I came to *Art of the Prank*. And arguably, it's the best way to come to this film. Not knowing anything about it other than that it's a documentary, it's funny, it's informative and it's a film that you should seek out. Part of the 2016 Revelation Film Festival lineup, *Art of the Prank* follows the varied exploits of Joey Skaggs – a prankster, an activist, the grandfather of the media hoax, an artist.



For a long while, the modern 'prank' has been associated with pranksters like the *Jackass* crew or Ashton Kutcher's *Punk'd* shows. These shows were simply designed to create laughs and shock with gross-out acts. They were very surface level 'pranks' that were simply designed to entertain in some form. Joey Skaggs however, used the medium of 'pranks' to manipulate the media. Specifically, to show how easily the media can be manipulated and duped into airing stories that they either fail to verify, or simply want to be the first to cover.

In the age of Facebook and 140-character tweets, it's easy to understand the allure of a news piece which catches the eye; stories that seem just true enough to be real. Joey Skaggs pranks were simply that, to not only trick the media into thinking they were real – what with pranks like the confessional booth on a bicycle, or the bordello for dogs – but to then also shine a light on the foibles of the media when it's finally revealed that it was not real at all. The many varied pranks make for some genuinely hilarious moments – the aforementioned bordello is a simply joyous moment as the media fuel themselves into a frenzy about bitches being pimped out in New York. One particular moment where Skaggs portrays a doctor in a news interview while dressed in an over the top, extremely obvious 'fake' uniform is exceptionally funny simply for the ridiculousness of the situation and how obviously fake it is – all the while, the reporters sit in a dead pan serious pose, believing every word out of Skaggs mouth.



Some documentaries have an interesting idea or subject and fail to deliver that in an entertaining manner. Fortunately, *Art of the Prank* is both entertaining as well as very, very enlightening. Joey Skaggs is an intriguing and relatable individual. He wants to help make changes in the world, and can do that through the way he knows best. These 'pranks' aren't the 'pop a balloon behind someone and run away' style – they are living art pieces. They exist in the world to help people look at the world in a different manner, or to encourage people to think outside their usual 24/7 world.

While I've become accustomed to tuning into *Media Watch* to get a gauge on what the media is up to and whether they are right or wrong, *Age of the Prank* reminds us that it is up to us to take action and be responsible for not just taking that unverified Facebook update as gospel. It asks us to make sure that we keep the media accountable for what they are reporting, while also encourages us to think about what is reported. After all, there could be a mind like Joey Skaggs behind that news report who wants you to think more about a certain subject.



Art of the Prank is highly recommended viewing and will have its Australian debut at the 19th Revelation Film Festival. Sessions are as follows:

Sun 10, 2.30pm, SX (Buy Tickets)

Mori 11, 9pm, Luna Leederville (Buy Tickets)

Sun 17, 4.40pm, Luna Leederville (Buy Tickets)

Director: Andrea Marini

Cast: Joey Skaggs, Mark Borkowski, Robert Forster



ART OF THE PRANK · DOCUMENTARY · JOEY SKAGGS · REVELATION FILM FESTIVAL

4

GREAT

By **Andrew Peirce**

Andrew has been a film lover all of his life. For a while now he's been talking about how great films are and usually that's been directly to his wife, Bernadette. Now with the AB Film Review everyone else in the world can listen to what Andrew has to say to his wife.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN SAYING

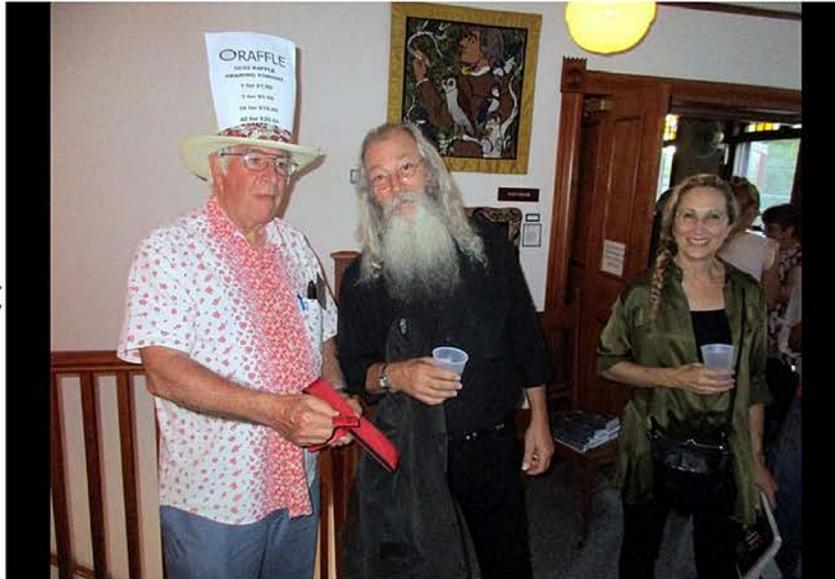


Welcome to Woop Woop – 1997 –
Stephan Elliot – The Last New Wave



64 – Red Billabong, Down Under, Bad
Moms, Love & Friendship, The Legend
of Tarzan, Batman: The Killing Joke

Media hoaxer visits EOH



▲ HIDE CAPTION

Earlville Opera House volunteer Art Zimmer, left, media hoaxer Joey Skaggs, center, and film producer Judy Drosd pose at the EDH on Aug. 27. Skaggs and Drosd were in town for the showing of "Art of the Prank," a documentary on Skaggs' work. (PHOTOS BY MIKE JAGUAYS/MID-YORK WEEKLY)



Thursday
 Posted Sep 1, 2016 at 9:43 AM



By Mike Jaquays

A brothel for dogs. Condominiums for guppies. A priest traveling busy New York City streets with a portable confession booth on the back of his bike.

Thursday
 Posted Sep 1, 2016 at 9:43 AM



Joey Skaggs has brought these and many other equally intriguing stories to national attention via the news media. Unfortunately for the reporters relating his news, however, none of them were actually true.

Share



Decades before anyone was "Punk'd" on TV, Skaggs - a multi-media artist and activist - was making his own personal message known by promoting his less-than-truthful stories in a wide variety of news outlets, including such luminaries as CNN, Good Morning America, and the New York Times.

His hoaxer career has been immortalized in the new film documentary "Art of the Prank," and Skaggs, along with several of his fellow driving forces behind the movie, came out to the Earlville Opera House (EOH) on Aug. 27 for an intimate look at the film and the prankster himself.

Skaggs said his quest to fool the news media is designed to illustrate their own lack of research in verifying news sources. He also wants to make people think while making them laugh at the same time, he said.

"I've always gotten away with it - clothes really do make the man," Skaggs said of his hoaxes.

His appearance at the EOH was a fitting tribute to the man who once saved the much-loved venue from oblivion. Back in 1971, Skaggs was living on a farm in the area when he heard the building was for sale - and possibly facing a future as a parking lot if not saved from demolition. It had already been abandoned for 15 years, but Skaggs saw the building and felt a connection.

Thursday
 Posted Sep 1, 2016 at 9:43 AM



Skaggs bought the facility and incorporated it, later offering to donate it to a non-profit group who would keep it alive with cultural offerings to benefit the community. He reflected on the accomplishments of the EOH personnel over the interim years with a sense of pride.

Share



Skaggs gave kudos to the audience for keeping his dream alive.

"Thank all of you for 45 years later making this all come true," he said.

For more information on his work, visit www.joeyskaggs.com.

Joey Skaggs



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