Joe Matheny, a founding father Culture Jammer, was kind enough to give what he called his "last interview" online to *Escape*. Now happily working towards his pension in an anonymous programmer's job, Joe famously spammed the White House with a bunch of email frogs and caused uproar in American media society with his many japes. But why did it get all serious? And why are none of the original CJers talking to each other? What follows is the unedited version of the interview published in December 1997's *Escape*. All the hotlinks are Joe's.

So who started Culture Jamming as a phenomenon, and why?
Boy, that's a loaded question! No, really. It depends on who you ask. Personally I trace the roots of media pranking, or "culture jamming" as it's known these days, to people like Orson Welles and his famous "*War of the Worlds*" broadcast in America, or even his lesser known film "*F is for Fake*". More recently, a scientist by the name of Harold Garfinkle conducted something called breaching experiments, in which he studied the flexbility of peoples belief systems by fabricating stories and then guaging peoples reaction to them.He called this field of study Ethnomethodology and popularized it in his book *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Garfinkle would incrementally make the his stories wilder and more speculative until the subjects would finally reach a point of disbelief. (in other words Garfinkle perpetrated lies, and then "pushed the envelope" with his subjects)

In the 60s CJ was taken to a whole new level by two very differnet groups. The first group was a French art movement known as the Situationist International. Founded by former Letterist and Imaginist Bauhaus members, the SI made radical proclaimations such as "It is still possible to take advantage of the fact that radio and television stations are not yet guarded by troops." Fueled by the Post literate era of big buget media, modern advertising, and Television culture, the SI literally saw the "signal" of the coporate message as a coerscive invasion of the collective consciousness. Their practice of Detournement [viz. the practice of appropriating common objects or images from their usual cultural contexts and resituating them in an incongruous and disorienting fashion so as to confront/challenge society's norms (biases)] is the Mother of modern Punk poster art and Postmodern cut-up art. (Both Malcom Mclaren and artisit Jamie Reid of *God Save the Queen* poster fame were former SI admirers)

In the United States, the Yippie movement, fronted by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, tried to subvert the corporate media message by sending confusing signals of their own, by practicing guerrila media pranks and random street theatre, all aimed at drawing attention to the then fadish anti-war movement and budding pop-anarchist movements. The infamous Chicago Seven trial was used as a grandstand for the Yippie platform to dupe the traditional media into "press conferences" where reporters were instructed to "set their Yippie decoder rings to L-7", etc.

In retrospect, both these movements fell victim to the same media traps that they thought they were making transparent by their antics. SI art now sells for a high price in the galleries, Jerry Rubin became a Wall Street investment broker,before being run over by a car and Abbie Hoffman, a chronic manic depressive, died of an apparent drug overdose.

In the 80s, several groups revived the spirit of CJ with some rather whimsical twists. The tape collage band Negativeland (credited with coining the term "Culture Jamming" on Jamcon '84) perptrated several media hoaxes, the most famous of which resulted in the band and their label being sued by the Irish rock band U2. Negativeland released an album called U2, with the picture of the U.S. U2 spy plane on the cover. The release of the album slightly preceded a new release by the band U2, and caused confusion on the part of consumers and record retailers, many of which mistakenly bought the Negativeland album, thinking it was a recording of Bono and the boys. Imagine the confusion when drooling teeny boppers got home with their record only to hear a Kazoo version of "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For", accompined by some outakes of Casey Casem cursing like a sailor between takes of Amerca's Top 40 (a very "clean-cut" nationally syndicated pop music radio show). The whole fiasco has since been documented in a movie.

Prior to the U2 incident, Negativeland had perpetrated another hoax known as the Helter Stupid incident, in which they wrote up a fake wire news wire story about a fictious boy who had "Ax murdered" his parents while under the influence of Negativelands "Christianity is Stupid" album. They then faxed the fake wire stories to several key media organizations, who ran the story. Other media outlets picked up the story and ran it (not wanting to look "out of the loop"). It all culminated with Negativelands studio being surrounded by News cameras, and the boys all grinning and saying "what story?"

The other group is the Church of the Subgenius, a much more sophmoric approach to "breaching the proscenium" of modern media and group think. The CSG is a mock religion, and I mean mock in everyway. They have a so-called guru named J.R. "Bob" Dobbs, an aluminum siding salesman, who is endowded with super sales powers, and according to the SG rant, will cut a deal with the invading powers of evil on doomsday (X day), and buy the Earth, saving it from sure destruction. There are some very witty people at work here, and although a lot of the material is very crude, some of it is extremely witty and poignant.

In the 90s I picked up on all this and decided that the Internet was the perfect tool for the dissemination of mis-informnation as well as being an extremely intimate environment for media hijinx. I started the Incunabula on-line campaign in 91, in which the goal was to convince certain X-Files types (this was pre-X-Files) that there was an alternate universe that was being settled by modern quantuam scientist/anrchist

types, and that the goverment was out to stop them at any cost. I set myself up as a character in the story, sort of a nutty progressive journalist type, who was out to learn the truth at any cost. Along the way I interviewed several key figures in the story, and eventually had to "migrate" myself, to avoid capture by the shadow goverments MIBs.

When the United States Whitehouse made a big to-do over getting an email addresses, I greeted them to electronic land by mail bombing the address with ascii pictures of toads. I called it the *Reign of Toads*. Unfortunately, someone had set up a auto-replied thank you message, but forgot to account for some shiftless hacker having too much time on his hands, therefore resulting in myself being counterbombed by countless "Thank you for contacting whitehouse.gov" type letters. I quickly had to write a shell program that filtered out these messages and forwarded them back to the originator, thereby effectively setting up an endless loop of bomb-reply-forward-reply-forward, ad infintum. My friend who was the SA at the ISP that I was using for my homebase on this project finally had to call me and ask me to stop, since I was seriuosly eating into his CPU and Mail Server time.

The funny thing is, the only fall out from all this was from a few ISPs that were unwittingly used in the process, and the fact that somehow the media picked up on the story and desended on me like moths to the flame.

I have since retired from such shenanigans, and in fact I have avoided the media for the past several years. This will be my last such interview. You were just so darn polite.

Is it supposedly an anarchist movement (i.e. overtly political)?
I guess it was at one time, with the SI and the Yippes, but in recent times it's more akin to college pranksterism. There are some groups that are sort of militant about it, like Ad Busters.

What is the secret of a great scam?
If I told you that I'd never get out of this interview alive! But seriously, the key is to make the subject beieve that what is happening is acceptable behavior for as long as you can get away with it. Either that, or completley blind side your target. The two methods are known as finese and force, respectively.

What qualities/equipment are vital to pulling one off successfully (oops - sounds a bit rude)?
There is no equipment list. Use your imagination. As far as qualities,a vivid imagination, the desire to succeed, a flair for theatrics and "human engineering" (hacker term for making people believe your someone that your not, usually a authority figure), a sense of humor, and a lot of spare time.

What are the dangers/pitfalls - have you ever suffered for your

"art"?

None, other than the fact that when the US media jumped all over CJ a few years ago, many so-called pranksters used that as an oppourtunity to "cash-in" thereby destroying the movement from within. Nothing like a little greed and in-fighting to kill off all the fun! The whole CJ in the media episode made me reevaluate the usefulness of critisism from beyond the pale. I now think people are either amused or annoyed by it in general, bu I no longer see it as any kind of sweeping force for social change.

Is CJ dead?

No. It will always be around as long as we have people who are not content with the consensus reality, bored students, and people who crave media attention no matter how they get it. I guess that's the real secret, the Culture Jammers are as addicted to the media as those that they accuse of being asleep. Maybe even more so.

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