



◀ the criticism *Vice* has faced over the years.

'There was a time in the Nineties when it was all about cocaine and asymmetrical zippers,' Smith admits. 'We did a lot of drugs and went to a lot of parties and had sex with a lot of supermodels. But you realise there's a whole world out there, and as we've expanded, the scope of the magazine has got broader.'

To that end, Smith has set up VBS.tv, an online television station which boasts Spike Jonze as its creative director. 'They're inventing new things every day,' says Tom Freston, a creator of MTV and former head of Viacom. 'It reminds me of MTV in the early days.'

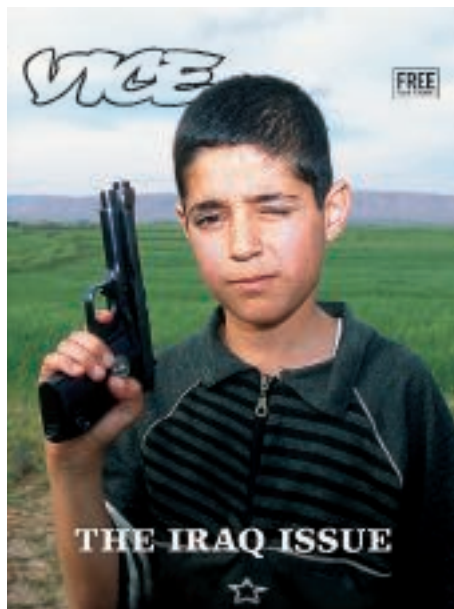
'We became a magazine when the barriers to making a magazine effectively became nonexistent,' explains Smith. 'You could do desktop publishing on a Mac and print for cheap. Now you get a digicam and a Mac, and you can have something broadcast on the net within 15 minutes.'

It was VBS that premiered *Heavy Metal in Baghdad*, a documentary about four young metal fans in the war-torn city trying to rehearse and play gigs to a tiny group of like-minded fans before escaping to Syria. The film won critical acclaim at the Toronto International Film Festival. Its producer, Monica Hampton, and editor, Bernardo Loyola, worked with Michael Moore on *Fahrenheit 9/11*. So where do the magazine's political allegiances lie? 'We're not trying to say anything politically in a paradigmatic left/right way,' argues Smith. 'We don't do that because we don't believe in either side. Are my politics Democrat or Republican? I think both are horrific. And it doesn't matter anyway. Money runs America; money runs everywhere.'

The *Vice* brand – for all its dislike of celebrity – now has a growing band of celebrity followers. As well as Jonze, Hollywood stars Luke Wilson, Johnny Knoxville and the film director Michel Gondry are all friends of *Vice*. More unlikely still is the Bono connection. 'I have to admit we've also started working with Bono. I should hate him,' Smith laughs, 'but he's a good guy.' The 'good guy' has called VBS 'punk rock for the 21st century', so one wouldn't really expect Smith to describe him any other way.

After dinner, we move on to a party in an old warehouse in East Berlin. The walls are covered in peeling paint, and Berlin's hipsters are queuing to get in. Peaches, the New York DJ, is playing, and Smith and Alvi are circling the room. Among the party talk I hear snatches of conversation about international distribution deals and future projects. Earlier that evening, under the disco ball, Smith said of the early years: 'We definitely tried to put our flag in the sand against the status quo media.' Now the line attached to online TV station VBS reads: 'In 10 years, we'll be the mainstream.'★

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Grin and bear it 'There are no guidelines detailing what is and what is not a Vice photo,' says editor Jesse Pearson. 'We like the goofy and the beautiful, the stupid and the smart...' Above: naked bear wrestling by Scott Lenhardt. Right: Yobert Younan's photo was used on the cover of March 2007's Iraq issue, which was written entirely by Iraqi citizens

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