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**A Look at Video Mix Culture**  
**Where Have We Been and Where Are We Going?**

by Peter Rubin

*Ability is what you're capable of doing.  
Motivation determines what you do.  
Attitude determines how well you do it.*

On the one hand, participation in the contemporary VJ phenomenon is as explosive as in any art form on the planet today. Unfortunately, on the other hand, over the past decade, the genre has nonetheless regressed backwards, from its once significant art and social influence, to its present stage of trivial irrelevance.

Today's clubs are all about raw power and energy with no direction. VJ visions have been reduced to graphic design or the latest hard- and software tricks and effects. About bombarding the senses, with no thoughts whatsoever about reaching the heart. Confusion and commercialization have stripped the soul out of the VJ experience.

In today's world, the VJs' biggest concern is their next DVD.

The problem, however, is not the VJ. Or the video mixing art form. What is happening in clubs is happening in every facet of our lives.

The problem is culture.

Commercialism is being used by the power structure to separate people.

I'll repeat that, because this is one of the most fundamental problems which exist in the world today:

Commercialism is being used by the power structure to separate people.

It's as simple as that.

Rich from poor. Race from race. Culture from culture. The powerful from the weak. And all the hierarchies in between.

The more people are separated, the easier they are to control. Because the more people get together by themselves, the more the power structure is threatened.

Peer acceptance is now based upon sharing commercial trends, rather than sharing ideas. Such cultural submission allows the power structure – even *encourages* the power structure – to control our hardware and software, our modes of communication, our habits, our minds, and ultimately our hearts.

And they do that by commercializing our perceptions, attitudes, desires and behavior, and, thus, our visions of reality. So we become willing pawns, controlled by their manipulating whims.

As a result, cultural values have eroded, as our privacy and civil rights have eroded.

Choices become fewer and fewer, as challenges grow ever larger and more complex.

All this results in our attempting to use technology to build safe walls around our personal worlds - walls of separation and isolation - rather than reaching out to our extraordinary global, multi-cultural community.

And, as a result, we lose one of the most vital aspects of our existence on this planet. The desire and ability to communicate with other human beings.

*"The problem with writing about VJing by starting from the 90s on is that most of the Big, conceptual, medium redefining work had already been done at that point.... It is like starting to watch a movie 30 minutes in.... the threads are much harder to follow... and lead to a lot of whacky misconceptions..." Stefan G.*

In a recent interview, I was asked to describe what video mixing was like during its formative first 13 years (actually its golden years), between 1979-1992? In answering, I referred to the succeeding 90's and 00's generations:

"The people who have grown up in this 20 year void, when they think of social struggles, they think, 'Oh my God, that's not the kind of thing to have in a club! That's work! That's hard. You can't have a good time with that.'

Well, when the Hippies were doing it, they had a fantastic time in the club! Because they were all together. And they were doing something of value.

"The club was a place of inspiration. The visuals that were going on in those times, were what was going on in the streets. And it inspired the hell out of people. And so, when you went into a club, it was like, you know, right on! It's happening here, it's happening in that part of the country, it's happening in that part of the world, it's spreading, we're getting our message out! You know, LET'S DO IT!!!

"And so ... the spirit and the energy were enormous. That's how they were able to get everybody together.

"... You think of Hippie visuals and everybody thinks, 'Oh, the wax machines and the acid stuff,' and things like that. That was all *part* of it. In those clubs, there was all sorts of stuff going on the screens about what was happening in the streets.... so that, when you created *anything*, the People were always Number One. The community was always Number One.

So when John and Yoko were doing their sleep-in in Amsterdam, they were doing that for *peace*! They weren't doing that to sell records. They weren't doing it as a commercial gimmick.

"And everybody knew that... The generation knew exactly what was going on there. And that stuff was on the screens all over the place."

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Everything about New Wave and early House and Techno culture was about people, communicating with and supporting each other.

Supporting values and activities relating to street reality.

Relating to the new subcultures' identity, growth and development.

The early video mixing artists were simply attempting to participate in and further that spirit of togetherness and community solidarity.

And the music and the visuals, ***perceived as equal supporting elements***, joined together to reinforce these feelings.

New Wave and House culture took their energies and identity from inclusiveness, not separation. As a result, a global movement arose, the global House Nation. My House is Your House and Your House Is Mine. The early video mixing artists didn't try to get their work shown in every club in town in order to become famous. There were no stars nor, God forbid, any desire for superstardom. Quite the contrary, the star system and superstardom were what everyone was fighting against.

How sad it is that the art form has turned so dramatically in opposite directions.

The vast majority of today's VJ's would much rather spend their time attempting to achieve greater commercial power within the VJ hierarchy, than trying to understand the personal needs of their audiences, both local and global.

Thus, the work winds up as meaningless, moving wallpaper. Which is just what commercialism wants. Enormous amounts of thoughtless energy sell a lot of beer.

Of course, much more significant is the fact that a potentially vital and dynamic form of social communication is wasted by watering it down to a vehicle for mindless entertainment. In effect, the VJ is allowing the medium to be controlled by the same old right-wing agendas intent on suppressing any youth cultural opposition to current commercial/governmental attitudes and policies.

And the longer VJ's continue to build walls around themselves, separating themselves from street reality and the communities they truly should be serving, the worse will conditions become on the streets of everyone's communities.

As overwhelming as all this seems, as overwhelming as life seems, there is a simple way out of this trap: dropping the ego and formulas for commercial success, and beginning to rebuild the street community. Finding inspiration, giving motivation and becoming an active part of the street community. Not only the VJ entertainment community, or walled-in personal communities, but the local and global street community.

All the elements are there.

Clubs and independent spaces are everywhere, and increasing in numbers.

Everywhere. There are thousands upon thousands of video mixing artists.

Everywhere. Increasing in numbers. Everywhere. The hardware is there, the software is there. And everything is linked together via cyberspace. An absolutely enormous global network is there. With an unlimited potential for bringing people back together again. All the energy, vitality and, yes, even all the job opportunities you could ever wish for are there.

Rather than commercially inspired *competition*, which is used to narrow and manipulate available opportunities and resources, a new vision is there, based on global *cooperation* and *collaboration*, breeding ever-increasing opportunities for all.

Everything is there for the taking. The only thing that's still not there is the will, determination and dedication by individuals to accomplish the task.

Given all the above, I will now attempt to suggest some pathways out of the current video mix wilderness, in order to bring fresh inspiration and motivation to the VJ identity.

I, therefore, offer up four possible new initiatives for the video mix community to consider, in order to gain 1) far wider public acceptance and influence, while 2) building a stronger ideological foundation and identity, which will lead to 3) far wider creative possibilities, as well as 4) wider potentials for the accumulation of necessary resources.

The basic premise of these ideas involves bringing together the raw **power** of the video mix experience with the **message** potential of a complementary communications element.

In the following two historic examples, one can see how the merging of a "message culture" with a "power culture" far surpassed each culture's individual potential. This cross-cultural fertilization then created a much more dynamic and influential artistic and social force.

### RnR/Folk Cultures (power/message)

From 1953 to 1965, during its initial years of existence, the message of RnR revolved almost exclusively around the love song, in its traditional sense and within its now updated contemporary extension: I love Rock 'n Roll.

"I Love RnR," sung in thousands of variations for an entire decade, was the manifesto which declared RnR to be more than just a form of music, but also the identity of an entire new culture. It was the Declaration of Independence by the first microelectronic generation, from past industrial era generations and ideas.

The iconic image of "I Love RnR" culture was the electric guitar, which came to define the range and identity of the new music. It also presented the perfect symbol for the generation's forward looking, technological visions. Yet, the Rockers had no further desire to influence the world, other than to affirm their existence within general society.

At that time, the culture concerned with the real lives of people, which promoted peace, human rights and understanding, was Folk Culture, incorporating traditional folk music and blues into a socially-based musical form.

However, this movement, led by the most respected and influential folk singer of the time, Pete Seeger, and the brash young newcomer by the name of Bob Dylan, was much smaller than the Rock scene. It was also manipulated and controlled tightly by the government and the record industry.

In classic Machiavellian fashion, the industry constructed a commercial marketing policy that separated the two cultures. The prime consideration here was to avoid the instability that could occur if Folk's social messaging ever became part of the rapidly-growing RnR energy juggernaut. Thus, the industry manipulated the cultures' different (though not opposing) ideologies into a highly opposing and confrontational (and profitable) policy of market competition.

As a result, the Folk movement completely rejected the electric guitar and all its screaming energy, viewing it as the symbol of all the commercial directions the music industry was pursuing with RnR. The Folkies looked at Rock as thoughtless noise, rather than an inspiration for any creative ideas and ideals. The Rockers looked at the Folkies as a bunch of beatniks, dropouts and druggies (drugs were not a part of early RnR popular culture. In fact, early Rock culture was heavily anti-drugs. This attitude was also encouraged and exploited by power structure policies, to create a further separation between the two cultures).

Then, all at once, like a flash of lightning from out of the blue, this dominating governmental/commercial policy of separation and competition, that had gone on unchecked for eleven years, changed in an instant. And forever.

In 1965, at the Newport Folk Festival, Folk Music's most important annual event, at

which electric guitars were virtually banned, Bob Dylan, now the headlining star of the show, was doing a sound check with members of the Paul Butterfield Blues Band. Wearing an almost pop-art polka dot shirt, Dylan suddenly switched from his acoustic to an electric guitar and began warming up. The most legendary story of that moment is that Pete Seeger shouted to the sound technicians, "Clean up that sound so we can understand the words!"

Whereupon, they shouted back, "No, this is the way they want it!"

Whereupon, Seeger answered, "Goddamn it, if I had an ax, I'd cut the cable!"

Whereupon, Seeger started asking everyone where he could find an axe?

With Dylan's lead, Folk culture's *messages* of protest and social activism joined the *power* and identity of rock 'n roll, which quickly gave birth to the Hippie movement and solidified the history and subsequent ideological evolutions of what we have come to know as dance subcultures.

Peter Stone Brown, noted music critic of the time, wrote:

"That night at the evening concert, Dylan ... launched into *Maggie's Farm* and in the three minutes it took to play the song, he changed music completely."

Arguably, the most important musical moment in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, in that instant Dylan joined together the most fundamental elements (i.e. power and message) of two complementary subcultures, elevating the influence and creative output of each to levels far beyond what either could have accomplished individually.

### [Internet/House Cultures](#) (power/message)

Up until 1989/1990, for the first +/-5 years of its existence, House culture generally looked at the computer generation as a bunch of weird nerds with big eyeglasses who did nothing but sit in front of their screens all day. The "geeks" thought of House culture as a strange collection of druggies, dropouts and losers (the old beatnik/hippie syndrome). Around the turn of the decade, the two finally opened up to each other and joined together on a variety of significant levels. Once these subcultures began working cooperatively, an ever-increasing number of social experiments in cyberspace followed, which laid down or supported the foundations for any number of directions which exist today (message list discussions stimulating projects and events, blogging, coordination of international funding and support resources, recognition and communication with third world youth cultures, creating bridges between street culture and traditional art communities, etc. etc.) In other words, the identification and coordination of the global House Nation movement (i.e. post-Hippie culture gone cyber).

Without the power of the Internet, the message of House culture would have been completely transformed into the commercially diluted entertainment phenomenon it has since become in most of the contemporary developed world. However, unknown to most, the spirit, ideals and traditions of House are very much alive and flourishing in many countries throughout the developing world.

Arguably (again), the world's most overlooked, misunderstood and disregarded positive social manifestation for the past 15 years has been the Love Parade. Started in 1989 as a march through downtown Berlin by 750 ragtag clubbers, it reached its numerical heights in the late 90's, involving 1\_-2 million marchers (depending on whose figures one believes).

Aside from being a massive annual demonstration for peace and non-violence, it also stimulated and/or supported many projects associated with the above causes (e.g. Project X – The Non-Violence Project: "NVP has been dedicated to fostering a radical

change in attitudes to violence and to inspire, motivate and engage young people around the world in positive action against violence.

"..... Through its model programs in Sweden, South Africa and the United States, the NVP and its partners have engaged more than 1.200.000 young people, working with hundreds of community schools, youth programs, local agencies and businesses.")

The Berlin parade always emphasized returning to true human values. At its height, there were +/- 50 different floats/wagons interspersed between the marchers, representing clubs, organizations, cities and foreign countries. There were hundreds of performers on display during the parade and at all the evening events which followed. Yet, at no time – during the parade, during the evening or within the publicity that preceded and followed the parade – was there ever any thought of choosing "the Best" of any of the participants involved (the Superstar mentality resulting from contemporary commercial conditioning). Nobody ever competed or wished to compete with anyone else at the parade. Nobody ever "battled" each other at the parade. Beauty was left to the eye of the beholder. Competition was replaced by cooperation. Participation was the paramount objective. A collective, active participation supporting a global youth movement for international harmony and understanding. An outreach to anyone from anywhere.

Throughout its history, the Love Parade's survival was always subject to the whims of the local Berlin political establishment (with additional influence certainly coming from the national political landscape). Ironically, it was always supported by Helmut Kohl's conservative Christian Democratic Party, who saw in the parade distinct opportunities for economic benefits to the city. However, when the Social Democrats came to power in the early 2000's, city policy shifted and the money spent on supporting the parade was then transferred to general civic policies the SPD considered more important.

After two unsuccessful years of trying to support itself, 2004 saw no Love Parade in Berlin. However, before its demise, and as a direct result of the Internet's power to communicate globally and instantly, there are now more than 20 countries throughout the world with Love Parade organizations. From Egypt and Israel to Chile, Argentina and Mexico, to Russia, South Africa and beyond, the Love Parade's ideals and programs are inspiring excitement and involvement in a global youth movement for peace and international cooperation and collaboration.

Without the power of the Internet to spread the message, the Love Parade – House culture's last significant global influence - would have died an ignominious and overlooked death, to be misinterpreted and trivialized by the mass media as well as future historians. Instead, it remains alive and vibrant, a vital and positive influence within the developing world. Which, given the increasing global polarization in contemporary reality, is exceedingly important.

In an interview with Groove magazine in Germany this past summer, I stated: "The evolution of the Love Parade structure proved to me that in our ever more cyber-connected world, events of value cannot be destroyed by past self-serving, centralized structures. For me, the internationalization of the Love Parade has come to symbolize the ever-increasing empowerment of the individual in every corner of our planet. With greater access to tools and information, the People increasingly have a greater opportunity to determine for themselves what past power elites have always determined for them. Everyone can be reached. Everyone wants to be reached. Everyone must be reached. "

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Thus, my suggestions for new initiatives by the Video Mix community (as a *power* culture), involve creating new, active and expanding working relationships with various *message* oriented elements of the contemporary youth cultural community.

The first of these power/message relationships involves the merging of **media** cultures, in this case: video mix culture with independent filmmakers. The second, the merging of **sub**cultures, in the present case: video mix culture with Rap/Hip-Hop culture. The third encourages video mixing initiatives concerned with contemporary social issues (the merging of **general** cultures), in this case Islamic/Non-Islamic cultures. The fourth calls for organizing arts events, conferences, seminars and educational programs via the merging of **cyber** cultures.

Development of programs that extend into the above four categories would go far towards elevating the video mixing form to its proper potential within the field of global communication. Which is to say, encouraging perspectives and approaches that deal with human meaning, human feeling and human involvement. Inspiring fresh approaches that reach for the mind and heart.

Within this overview as well, one could easily incorporate a combination – or all – of the above elements into a single, wide-ranging intercultural collaboration.

### **1) Merging of media cultures – Independent Film**

As one of several possible examples in the area of media cultures, my first suggestion would be to create a strong, new initiative, bringing VJ's and independent filmmakers together into an ever-widening collaboration.

#### **Background – Film/Video Relationships**

The once highly valued image has lost its significance within the video revolution. The image, after all, is the message.

Because of video's historic lack of adequate presentation, (i.e. TV sets as opposed to cinema's enormous, gorgeous images), video approaches have traditionally been focused not on the single image, but on the action taking place within the video flow. Thus, without our being aware of it, the amount of time we have been conditioned to dwell upon any single video image or thought has decreased to a point beyond our sensibilities.

The basic structure of the cinematic message has been transformed within video. Significant power has shifted from the hands of the director, representing the message, to the hands of the editor, representing perception and conditioning. In other words, for all our viewing lives, video communication and our resulting conditioned expectations have been based on pre-set commercial editing formulas that were/are determined, basically, by advertising agencies.

The video mix represents an historic break – and new third option - in the film/video formal relationship (this fact and its significance have yet to be realized or recognized). It has created a totally new visual format: the merging of cinema and video/TV. Since it is the first true communications form which must be based upon large screen video presentation, it inherently includes a new video potential for single image (i.e. message) recognition.

In theory, since it is a new form, with its own individual boundaries, it should be totally free of any pre-set, manipulative TV formulas. Thus, artist and public alike

could be allowed a vital, liberating, perceptive freedom that is as personal as it is varied, as intense as it is free from any sort of behavioral manipulation. Unfortunately, the contemporary, commercially dominated VJ has been overpowered by past and continuing TV conditioning.

By far, the most harmful and dangerous example of this is the MTV formula for music videos, wherein the visuals are simply used as a tool to reinforce the music. As opposed to cinema's much more evenly balanced approach between visuals and music, music videos will always consider the music to be the format's overriding and primary concern. The visuals have always been and will always be structured on a secondary level, to intensify (i.e. follow) the music. After all, MTV is trying to sell music, not visuals. In fact, MTV's visuals are nothing more than advertisements to buy the music. Their visual theories and editing practices have all been worked out by behavioral psychology research teams.

Which is to say, the current VJ mindset, of having to always follow the DJ's lead, is a glaring and stunning example of how the power structure (in this case, the record industry) can condition an entire communications generation to voluntarily submit to its rules, conditions and control.

Breaking such conditioning and such a dependence would significantly increase the potential of the video mix format. Cinema, rooted in the power of the image, embraces a much more creative and open approach to the musical/visual balance. A closer working relationship with filmmakers would serve as a strong, positive and natural influence for VJ's to reassess their creative subjugation within the contemporary club scene. It would help establish a new awareness, wherein music and visuals could lead or inspire each other equally and productively. Creating such a dynamic, new (or old, as it was originally) balance between music and visuals would greatly enhance the message and power potentials of both the independent film and video mix formats.

Independent Cinema has already begun to ride the energy and momentum of the current VJ explosion. Any number of independent films, events and projects covering or including the VJ scene have already been completed or are in the planning or production stages. A further and wider participation by video mixing artists would be greatly welcomed by this culture.

For their part, VJ's well need a resource that could not only provide the extensive range of visual material that filmmakers inherently produce (and which VJ's continually complain they lack), but also the influence and inspiration of a strong, message-based and independent visual art form.

To aid the community in this regard, I can suggest initial contact with the following film-based projects which have successfully begun to assimilate VJ's and growing VJ popularity into their plans and programs.

From the Microcinema website:

**[Microcinema International Mission](#)**

Microcinema's mission is to curate, exhibit, promote, and distribute innovative international moving image artists whose deeply personal and culturally relevant works are typically marginalized by the mainstream entertainment industry. Microcinema curates thoughtful, unique, and diverse screening programs, which are promoted, exhibited and distributed via alternative venues worldwide. Promotion and

dissemination of works via such screenings creates a necessary dialogue between artists and audiences, worldwide.

Microcinema supports this mission via exhibition-based events, advocacy, education and archiving, as well as by developing infrastructural support for alternative media organizations, labels, and venues worldwide. In doing so, Microcinema catalyzes the establishment of an international network of shared moving image programming, resources, information, and equipment.

Microcinema's Independent Exposure is a touring screening program of independent films, videos, and digital art that has been in existence since 1996. Independent Exposure is screened worldwide at various microcinemas and alternative venues and festivals around the world. Microcinema has presented the short film, video and digital works of over 1000 artists in 42 countries plus Palestine and Antarctica.

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The founder and curator of Microcinema is Joel Bachar. I'm sure Joel would enthusiastically be interested in following up any new VJ initiatives that would bring VJ's and independent filmmakers together into new forms of collaboration.

Contact:

Microcinema, Inc./Blackchair Productions

531 Utah Street

San Francisco, CA 94110

+1-415-864-0660

[info@microcinema.com](mailto:info@microcinema.com)

[http://www.blackchair.com/index/50\\_about](http://www.blackchair.com/index/50_about)

### **NowTheMovie & Revolution:USA**

In addition, here are two of the most dynamic production projects I know of at the moment, which successfully merge video mix and cinematic potentials into a distinctly new form of message-based media art and communication. Both are being co-organized by Coldcut, certainly one of the most important and influential visual arts groups working today.

From their websites:

#### **Now:**

"The kind of motion picture I am interested in will be like creating the modern LP record. It will be mixed into ways of thinking rather than cut linearly" – Francis Ford Coppola.

#### **You and NOW!**

YOU, the global network of filmmakers, will decide on the content: the footage for NOW! will be filmed by you, and sent to the NOW! team for editing...read more about this: [http://www.nowthemovie.org/take\\_part.php](http://www.nowthemovie.org/take_part.php)

#### **Collaborative Cinema**

Early cinematographic pioneers dreamt of global film networks that would exchange footage to create an international language of cinema: today digital cameras and the Internet are making this possible. NOW! aims to be a milestone in creating a new cinema; open, collaborative, speaking to a global audience. Our time is NOW! ...read more about this: [http://www.nowthemovie.org/take\\_part.php](http://www.nowthemovie.org/take_part.php)

#### **Sustainable Development and Shared Value**

NOW! is about the exploration of life on earth, specially our interdependence; the challenge of sustainable development; and the communication of 'real' or 'shared' value: from the many world views the film-makers will bring, the editors of NOW! will try to draw out the common ground of what is most valuable and sacred to all....read more about this: <http://www.nowthemovie.org/themes.php>

#### **Audio-Visual Collage - a 21st century genre**

NOW! takes its inspiration from cinema classics like; 'Man with a Movie Camera', The

Qatsi Trilogy and 'Baraka'. But NOW! will use the latest visual technologies and techniques. The film will be woven together with a soundtrack specially composed by Coldcut, and is planned to have a DVD release on the Ninjatune label.....read more about this: <http://www.nowthemovie.org/themes.php>

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### **Revolution:USA**

Revolution:USA is an online, multimedia political art project parented by Coldcut and NomIg ([www.nomig.net](http://www.nomig.net)) ..... and hosted by the [Society for Arts & Technology \(SAT\)](#) in Montreal. Their mandate is simple: to incite the public to assemble their own protest-ant magic from Coldcut's vast multimedia archive, including content uploaded by public contributors. The site also contains free audio loops and tracks created by Coldcut, which are available for use in would-be artist mixes. The aim is to build a digital A/V library replete with work that unearths the veiled wasteland of US politics, in order to invoke social change, and to create a new forum for meaningful artistic interactivity.

Contacts:

[revolution@nomig.net](mailto:revolution@nomig.net)

<http://www.revusa.net/main.php>

[info@nowthemovie.com](mailto:info@nowthemovie.com)

[http://www.nowthemovie.com/now\\_v4.html](http://www.nowthemovie.com/now_v4.html)

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I would certainly suspect that a concerted and expanded collaboration between the video mix community, Microcinema and Coldcut (and other such groups) would stimulate very positive, liberating and meaningful results.

### **2) The merging of subcultures - Rap/Hip-Hop**

One of the key primary aspects of the video mix form is that it was created and developed on the street and not by the recording industry. If the industry had created the first VJ, complete with its marketing machine, the present video mixing culture would never have existed. Instead, it would have started as a kind of Hollywood tech/rock groupie phenomenon. This, in turn, would have created a structure that could simply and continuously feed robots into the industry, to be manipulated any way directed, then discredited and discarded when the latest plastic formula finally wore out.

The fact that the form came from the street gave it its identity, its vitality and its ultimate ability to evolve into a true and new form of art and communication. It was a new form of language and experience made by and for the street/club community. It was not slick like MTV. It was too fast or choppy or free or open for the industry's tightly controlled guidelines. That freedom and that rejection created a cultural binding that brought together mixing artists and public into an ever-growing, ever-tighter independent relationship.

For the video mix form to regain its former vitality, influence and importance, joining together with contemporary, dynamic street cultures would serve to give it much needed meaning. It could also greatly infuse such street cultures with its innate power.

Arguably (once again), the most dynamic form of message oriented, musical street culture at the moment is Rap/Hip Hop culture. However, as they have done with both Punk and House/Techno, the music industry, mass media and governments are attempting to isolate the movement (i.e. the messages of the movement). They do this by falsely stereotyping Hip-Hop's messengers as pimps, gangsters, trouble

makers or commercial sell-outs, or hyper commercializing this socially provocative communication into titillating, "on the edge" entertainment. As with Punk and House cultures, all the genuine vitality is stripped from the messaging. Any inspiration or motivation desired by the artist, geared towards involving general culture in the social issues raised, turns into a mixture of fear, intimidation, confusion and separation. To avoid any problems with this result, the entire genre is smothered by a glitzy, commercial package that allows the public a mindless and entertaining way to escape from such confrontations.

Video mixing culture was born at the dawn of House culture and for its first seven years was an integral element of the culture's social development. Thereafter, as House culture became more and more commercialized (and, thus, less socially influential), video mixing built secure(?) walls around itself, in effect, trapping itself within a post House/Techno commercialized dance scene. And there it has remained, an empty voice with no meaningful messages to deliver, within a now socially discredited genre of music entertainment.

The involvement of the video mix community within the Hip-Hop scene would result in a powerful merging of multiracial cultures. It would also free the video mix form into a completely new form of music and mentality. Artists would be able to utilize the strengths of their individual and diverse backgrounds to create new, positive and deeper relationships between the cultures, based upon common needs and respect. The resulting collaboration would then offer a variety of fresh and powerful new approaches to current social positions within society.

An example of such a collaboration and a practical possibility for initiating such a direction is found in the following section.

### **3) Cross-cultural events – Culture/Culture**

By far and away, the most worrying trend within our global family at the moment is the increasing sense of alienation occurring between Muslim and non-Muslim cultures. Ironically, this has far less to do with the billions of people involved as it does with a narrow group of right-wing, political/commercial entrenched power interests and structures (on both sides). And, for a variety of reasons (all self-serving), mass media policies increasingly are emphasizing the confrontational aspect of this deteriorating relationship.

Yet, within the younger generation of Muslims, there has arisen a new possibility for a vast, global movement bringing the cultures together. It all began in France and grew out of the French Hip-Hop scene. Its thrust is a dynamic and positive approach to global acceptance, understanding and mutual collaboration and cooperation.

[http://www.africana.com/articles/daily/index\\_20000130.asp](http://www.africana.com/articles/daily/index_20000130.asp)

...rap, breakdancing, and graffiti art -- have gained a mass following in France, making the European nation the second largest consumer and producer of hip hop after the United States... Now, French hip hop has emerged as the voice of France's impoverished African and Arab minorities... More broadly, hip hop has emerged as a cultural vehicle for France's blacks and browns (Arabs) struggling to carve a space and identity for themselves in an often inhospitable environment...

...throughout the French hip hop nation there is an over-arching sense of belonging to an international hip hop community...

French posse claim they are not gangs of delinquents, but simply trying to

overcome racism and stay out of trouble by participating in hip hop festivals, dancing competitions, and graffiti art contests ("compétition des taggeurs").

Rap artists of African and Arab origin voice the sentiments of France's impoverished ethnic underclass, and often try to mobilize the ghetto youth for causes such as interracial solidarity and the unity of "black, beur, blanc" (blacks, Arabs and whites), the slogan of an annual anti-racist French hip hop festival and the title of France's first rap radio show, which began in 1991 on a station in Lille

Despite French hip hop's predominantly black and Arab following, this effort to use hip hop as a means of forging unity across racial lines is an increasingly central theme in French rap. Unlike their American counterparts, French rap groups are often multiracial. The Marseilles-based rap crew IAM (Imperial Asiatic Men)... stress the importance of racial tolerance and unity, and on the track "Blanc et Noire" compare Louis Farrakhan to France's radically conservative messenger of hate, Jean-Marie Le Pen of the National Front...

In the same way that the multi-ethnic collection of French soccer players who won the World Cup in 1998 (popularly referred to in France as "les blacks") symbolized the emergence of a new multi-racial generation of French youth, French hip hop often expresses a pluralistic vision of racial unity and tolerance.

Despite the existence of such positive, optimistic messages in French rap, the genre's more militant perspectives tend to get more attention from the French media... (*Ed Note: see following SF Chronicle article for the US perspective on this.*)

... Whether French hip hop crosses over in the United States or not, it is clear that French rappers, graffiti artists and breakdancers have created a vibrant youth culture that, although inspired by American forms of expression, has evolved into a uniquely French, independent cultural movement.

Laila Weir, in the San Francisco Chronicle:

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/08/22/CMGO87TBMQ1.DTL>

All of the Palestinians I talked to lamented media images of Arabs: negative stories of Palestinians as aggressors in the news, images of Palestinian militants on television and Arab bad guys in movies like "True Lies." Kamal Naser, a 29-year-old Silicon Valley worker, says, "You hear bad things all the time on the news, you're always the bad person on the TV, you're a terrorist, blah blah blah. And during an age when you're really self-conscious -- like in high school or whatever -- it's not cool to be an Arab."

Such stereotypes developed largely in response to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, according to Helen Samhan, executive director of the Arab American Institute Foundation. "New negative stereotypes emerged in and permeated throughout advertising, television, and movies, particularly those of the nefarious oil sheik and the terrorist," she writes. "The Arab as villain has been a favorite scapegoat of popular American culture..."

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Rather than simply creating stricter public laws and policies that threaten the civil rights of both Islamic and non-Islamic cultures, the way to ease these tensions is to create events and programs that bring the youth of both cultures together. Involvement by the video mix community in this new and dynamic cultural movement would bring a power and inspiration to the culture that simply does not

exist today.

#### **4) The merging of cyber cultures**

As social conditions continue to deteriorate throughout the world, the Internet is providing an ever-wider platform for progressive change in global socio/political thinking and activity. Within this context, the overall visual/media arts community is replete with websites and message lists attempting to galvanize artists and public into a positive, active social voice and force within the arts. Adding the power of the video mix environment to the message potential inherent in these discussion groups could lead to significant programs of global influence.

A few such lists:

Spectre (Europe): <http://post.openoffice.de/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/spectre>

Nettime (various global websites): <http://www.nettime.org>

Sarai (India): <http://www.sarai.net>

Empyre (Australia): <http://www.subtle.net/empyre>

To sum up things:

An active participation in meaningful experiences will create the natural energies to continue in such directions.

Pick an interest. Any interest you have. Hit Google. You'll get all the info you need to get involved.

It's that simple.

I've always said, you don't do social, social does you. It's the cause that catches your eye and your spirit. And in today's cyber reality, you're just a click away from every cause and every culture on the planet.

Ironically, many times the freshest ideas are the oldest ideas.

As in: bringing people together.

That's what communication does best – brings people together.

And that's the best thing that communicators can do as well.

There is an enormous potential for global resources that has remained untapped due to the divisions in the world.

Focus on what tomorrow would be like if we all worked together.

#### **CONCLUSION**

At one of the last Berlin Love Parades, I shared a taxi from the airport with a VJ and DJ from Latin America (Venezuela, I believe) who were also invited to perform during the weekend. Both were in their late 20's. The DJ was also a record producer and ran his own small company. He also made it very clear he was the self-appointed manager and agent of the VJ.

As one would imagine, I was very curious to know what was going through the mind of the VJ. With all the turmoil in Latin America, I imagined his work would be extremely interesting to view and discuss. However, every time I tried to direct a question to him, his buddy/manager would jump in before the VJ had a chance to speak.

"We're not interested in that kind of stuff," said the b/m. "We're here to learn how to make money. How we can become famous and sell a lot of DVD's. Learn what the people want, what we must give them and how we have to give it to them."

The danger in all this is that, in the past, the developing world's youth culture has been a courageous and powerful force for social idealism and reform. However, these former progressive instincts, visions and energies are today being transformed into a

thirst for glitzy, commercial success. Rather than attempting to create a liberating motivation, more and more are increasingly focused on learning how to establish local clones of escapist and decadent Western models. Not long ago, I was in an email discussion with a visual arts professor from the Philippines. Same thing was happening there. Industrialist commercial mentality is pervading the developing world with astonishing speed.

The VJ was obviously a very sensitive guy. Yet, throughout the entire 30-45 minute ride, the buddy/manager did *all* the talking. The VJ just sat in silence, half-listening and half-peeping out at the passing city. His eyes and manner looked lost, far away and bewildered. By the time we arrived at our destination, I had been completely blown away. I had just been witness to an immensely sad scene.

Though the present youth cultural trends may be providing some with short term, cheap thrills, such a path can only lead to inevitable stagnation and self-destruction. Communication of ideas and human feeling has been replaced by an over-riding desire to tinker with ever-developing tools. Current fascination resides in overcoming hard- and/or software frailties, rather than human challenges. Dignity is being replaced by imitation. Passions and visions are being steered from the warmth of personal interaction to the frost of innovative efficiency and one-dimensional thought and design. Communicators are being overwhelmingly manipulated by economic intimidation. Surface excitement and instant gratification are replacing deeper levels of individual confidence and meaning. Visions are momentary and fleeting.

The power structure is using commercialism to limit and distort our perceptions of reality, as well as our choices, freedoms and abilities to form and communicate independent voices and visions. Many years ago, I was asked to write an article for the opening issue of the first Super 8mm film magazine. In the article I said that we would be able to witness the form's rapid birth and death within our lifetime. Not the most optimistic message to give in an opening issue. In today's world, due to the speed of ever-changing digital realities, the power structure has the ability to force immediate change upon the buying public (i.e. from vinyl to cd's, super 8 to digicams, videotapes to DVD's). As the power structure continues to make past formats obsolete, the history of street art, culture and messaging vanishes – eliminating sources of inspiration for future generations. New innovations in technology also offers the power structure more efficient ways of controlling distribution. The Napster controversy showed how previously accepted Internet rights could be circumscribed by the power structure. The reason given was the loss of commercial profits. While that was certainly a factor in the case, another was the desire of the power structure to institute control (and the public's awareness of that control) over independent cyber actions on the part of the public.

Of course, the more the power structure succeeds in such conditioning, the more emboldened they become to further manipulate the public.

Thus (and ironically), the multi-cultural approach that could provide so much to enrich everybody's lives in today's world is rejected at a time when a more integrated global community is plainly possible. Instead, the world continues to speed along towards a conservative, ego-oriented and ever more dangerous isolationist reality. Since resistance to all this will be coming from a smaller and smaller minority of voices with fewer and fewer communication resources, general attitudes will very easily shrug off such attempts as coming from troublemakers or unrealistic idealists.

As each new form of hardware and software is introduced to the public, another link is tightened in the power structure's attempts to shackle the public i.e. us all. Those who continue to be lured into this commercial trap will soon enough enter the inevitable slaughterhouse. And, suddenly any desires for "entertainment" will sound very shallow indeed.

It doesn't have to be this way!  
All the elements are there for a brand new and positive beginning.

As far back as 1995, I wrote the following which, sadly, is as true today as it was a decade ago:

"In short, it's time for the people to take back their vision!  
What are needed now are ..... initiatives which can replace the present commercial manipulation of global identities;  
What is needed now is a new awareness, a new courage and belief, a new breed of truly independent young visionaries ..... born from the heart of the underground spirit, which is global and technological, and independent and free, in order to freshly inspire music and culture and bring the vision of the people back to the global family."

Four years later, in 1999, I wrote:

"It is vital that very new and different approaches be initiated and developed in the field of high technological mass communication geared to connect and inspire global youth culture.

As regards the future of digital art and visual communication, two alternative approaches are available at the moment. Will we choose the easier escape into the ego-oriented cyber worlds of self-profit and fantasy, or attempt the more difficult challenge, to realistically confront and enhance our rapidly changing planetary realities?

The answer to this question will go a long way in determining all our future fates."

I can only hope that a new spirit in youth culture and youth cultural communication will arise again, take hold and begin to grow in earnest, so that tomorrow's sun will shine brighter than the dimness which hovers over us all at the moment.

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