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ABOUT THE USE OF ANALOGUE PROJECTION

Tripping back to the light fantastic

A mini-revolution is happening in clubland visuals. For once the tools of the trade aren't based around computer graphics or expensive lighting but around equipment you've probably got knocking about in your loft: Super 8 projectors, slide carousels and loops of film.

Proving that with a bit of imagination old technology can often outshine even the most up-to-date light shows, visual collectives such as the Light Surgeons, Lazy Eye and Eikon have been transforming clubs around the country from bare, boring areas into spaces drowned in widescreen Technicolor, movement and light. And all they're armed with is gear you could probably pick up for less than a tenner at your nearest car boot sale. This is the lo-tech visual revolution.

"One of the best things about a Super 8 projector is that you only have to have a pair of eyes to download the information," says Chris Allen of the Light Surgeons. "There are some media that don't require lots of money, or lots of knowledge, and this is one of them."

"It costs nothing," says Spencer Bewley, who, as one half of Lazy Eye, has provided visuals for everything from clubs such as the Heavenly Social to tours for the likes of Death in Vegas and Beth Orton. "You can pick up a projector from a car boot sale for about a tenner. We get films from everywhere: junk

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shops, jumbles, friends. It depends how lucky you are. But if we can start from scratch, anyone can."

Allen agrees: "Our roots lie in bargains and rooting out old technology and trying to do something new with it... for me, that's what the whole cyberpunk thing is really saying. My brother's always been into his hip-hop, into breaks and samples, and that whole scene influenced me to take a similar look at visuals in clubs."

Rising to prominence during their spell providing the visuals for Ninja Tune's Stealth nights at the Blue Note in London, the Light Surgeons have built up an impressive CV that includes everything from tours for bands such as the Propellerheads, Bentley Rhythm Ace and Sneaker Pimps to corporate launches for Sony. They work by transforming their surroundings into screens and backdrops on to which the three-strong unit projects a barrage of films, slides and images, each simultaneously running off any one of up to 20 projectors. A typical night might see whole Super 8 films such as *Star Wars* and *THX 1138* overlaid with slides of Japanese instruction manuals, while 16mm loops of electronic interference and kung-fu flicks are repeated on top.

"We take parts from films that we think suit the music or that we think will get a reaction from the audience," says the Light Surgeons' Andy Flywell. "It might cause a smile, it might cause someone to throw up, but anything that gets a reaction is good enough by me."

The attraction of using film over hi-tech computer graphics or video projection isn't purely financial. Many have rejected the digital approach not only as being too expensive but also as being too cold



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and sterile, preferring the warmth and character that comes with old analogue equipment.

"It's the quality of image you get from film that you don't get from an LCD projector," says Allen. "We don't have anything against new technology; we use Macs and we play around with things visually on new equipment. It's just that much more satisfying to see the finished result projected through celluloid. It's got that magic. And it's ephemeral — it decays, it gets scratched. All of our machines have got things that go wrong with them and that adds to their individuality. They've got a soul that new technology doesn't seem to have."

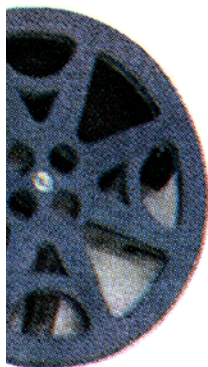
"I think it's better to offer an itchy, scratchy, dirty, funky type of experience," says Bewley. "It's like music. When it gets too polished, it loses a lot of the raw energy and character that was originally there. It's a bit more human, a bit more soulful, if it's raw, if it's got scratches and fingerprints on it. Well, that's our excuse, anyway."

A couple of companies have woken up to the commercial possi-

As the digital light shows that have dominated the dance scene begin to look increasingly clichéd, a new wave of visual artists is lighting up the clubs with cheap equipment from the past. **Daniel Pemberton** reports

bilities of the scene as well. "Somebody's realised there's a lot of people going to clubs and there's a space on the walls where you can project images — that's a cheap and effective way of advertising," says Izzy of Lazy Eye. "We've been given money by Rizla to do promotional loops for them."

Another advantage of the medium has been the quality of the visuals shown. You'd have to be on some serious "entertainment en-



hancers" not to have become bored with the seemingly endless deluge of clichéd computer-generated

graphics that have dominated clubland over the past decade or so. By returning to film, many visual artists discovered there was a huge untapped wealth of material ready to be plundered, and started approaching the area in the same way that samplers allowed hip-hop producers to revisit their old record collections for breakbeats, basslines and other sounds to help create new pieces.

The way we approach our material is often just like the way a hip-hop producer would take an old R'n'B tune apart and take the best part or a loop from it," says Allen. "It's putting loops together to create new meaning. You're picking a part of a cultural object and repeating it until it becomes a groove, then you start layering other things on it, building it up. It's like a band, really... but with us, we don't make sound — we throw light around."

"We use about four 16mm projectors and they'll be trained on to the same point," says Bewley of Lazy Eye. "We'll then mix loops from each projector almost as if it were two turntables. You'll be switching from one loop to the other in time with the music; it is very organic, funky and live. People keep saying to us, 'Why don't you put the whole show on video?', but you haven't got the quality or the control."

"It's like telling a DJ to bring along a DAT and just play his set," adds Izzy. "The thing is, if you're actually there, operating the projectors, turning them on and off in time to the music, it's got that live edge you'd lose with a video projector."

But with both collectives keen to expand into other fields, it looks as if these car boot bargains are merely a starting block for entering many different areas. The Light Surgeons have already produced a video for Cornershop and are interested in projects such as title sequence design and subversive public projections. They'll also be exhibiting at the ICA later this year with Lazy Eye, Vegetable Vision and Tomato — and all of this thanks to technology most had left to rot years ago.

"In the future, when the new technology becomes the old technology, that's when we can pick it up cheap," says the Light Surgeons' Andy F. "When it's available to other people, they can start using it for something different and innovating in the same way we've done with film, slide and Super 8. There's a cycle and it keeps filtering down."

"As a technology becomes more accessible, it starts to become liberated from what it was originally made for," adds Andy Flywell. "All the technology derives from some sort of sordid warfare or government source, but when it bubbles down to the street level, when you can buy these things secondhand and take them apart and stick them back together, that's when the interesting stuff happens."